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END RABIES TOGETHER: SEPTEMBER 28 IS WORLD RABIES DAY



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St. Lucie County, Fla. – The Florida Department of Health in St. Lucie County (DOH-St. Lucie) recognizes World Rabies Day as an opportunity to promote rabies awareness and prevention for all St. Lucie County residents. DOH-St. Lucie's Health Officer Clint Sperber would like to remind residents to avoid contact with wild and stray animals to protect themselves from the risk of rabies exposure.

Rabies is the deadliest disease on earth with a 99.9% fatality rate in humans once clinical symptoms of the disease appear. Annually rabies results in over 55,000 deaths worldwide. Most of these deaths occur in Africa and Asia with almost 50% of the victims being under the age of 15. Rabies is transmitted through exposure to the saliva and nervous tissue from a rabid animal through a bite, scratch, or contact with mucous membranes such as the eyes, nose, or mouth.

In Florida, raccoons, bats, foxes, and unvaccinated cats are the animals most frequently diagnosed with rabies. Other animals that are at high risk for rabies include skunks, otters, coyotes, bobcats, stray or unvaccinated dogs and ferrets. Annually, St Lucie County has approximately 90 cases of possible rabies exposures involving humans. Knowing how to keep safe and avoid rabies exposure should be a priority with all St. Lucie County residents.

It is important that residents follow steps to protect themselves and their loved ones against rabies:

- Keep rabies vaccinations up to date for all pets.
- Keep your pets under direct supervision so they do not come in contact with wild animals. If your pet is bitten by a wild animal, seek veterinary assistance for the animal immediately and contact your local animal control services.
- Call your local animal control agency to remove any stray animals from your neighborhood.
- Spay or neuter your pets to help reduce the number of unwanted pets that may not be properly cared for or regularly vaccinated.
- Do not handle, feed, or unintentionally attract wild animals with open garbage cans or litter.
- Never adopt wild animals or bring them into your home.
- Teach children never to handle unfamiliar animals, wild or domestic, even if they appear friendly.
- Prevent bats from entering living quarters or occupied spaces in homes, churches, schools, and other similar areas, where they might come in contact with people and pets.

If you see an animal that is acting unusually, report the animal to local animal services for handling:

- St. Lucie County Animal Control 772-462-8120
- Port St Lucie Animal Control 772-871-5042
- Fort Pierce Animal Control 772-467-3149

If bitten or scratched by a wild animal or stray you should report the incident to your doctor immediately, as well as local animal services and the local county health department. The contact number to report an animal bite to DOH-St. Lucie is 772-462-3883.

If you have an unvaccinated pet the Humane Society of St. Lucie County, Inc. is having a special rabies vaccination clinic and will be offering rabies vaccinations for pets that are four months and older for just \$10.00 this Saturday, September 26th from 11:00 AM till 3:00 PM at their shelter location 8890 Glades Cut Off Road. For more information on the rabies vaccination clinic go to their website at www.hsslc.org.

For additional information on rabies, go to the Florida Department of Health website: <http://www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/rabies/index.html>; World Rabies Day website: <http://rabiesalliance.org/world-rabies-day>; or contact DOH-St. Lucie's Environmental Health office at 772- 873- 4931.

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