

October 22, 2015



## RABIES ALERT

*For St. Lucie County*

**Contact:**

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St. Lucie, County – The Florida Department of Health in St. Lucie County (DOH-St. Lucie) has issued a rabies alert to remain in effect for 60 days. The geographical area related to the alert includes:

- North of Prima Vista Blvd
- East of St. Lucie County Fair Grounds
- West of Highway A1A
- South of Indrio Rd

The alert is in response to an above average percentage of animals testing positive for rabies this year. St. Lucie County's five year average is two rabid animals a year. Between March and October of this year five animals have tested positive for rabies including one cat, three raccoons and one bat. Health officials urge residents to avoid contact with wild and stray animals to protect themselves from the risk of rabies exposure. "Rabies is a potentially fatal disease. It is important not to handle wild animals, to be aware of unusual acting animals, and to keep pets vaccinated against rabies," said Clint Sperber, County Health Officer.

All residents of St. Lucie County should be aware that rabies is present in the wild animal population and domestic animals are at risk if not vaccinated. The public is asked to maintain a heightened awareness that rabies is active in St. Lucie County. Alerts are designed to increase awareness to the public, but they should not give a false sense of security to areas that are not indicated in the alert.

An animal with rabies could infect other wild animals or domestic animals that have not been vaccinated against rabies. All domestic animals should be vaccinated against rabies and all wildlife contact should be avoided, particularly raccoons, bats, foxes, skunks, otters, bobcats and coyotes.

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. Along with local animal services, DOH-St. Lucie works to prevent rabies by assisting with animal bite investigations and testing of animals for rabies through the Florida Department of Health Bureau of Laboratories. DOH-St. Lucie also provides rabies vaccinations to victims of animal bites, the only known effective treatment for rabies prevention in humans.

The following are steps you can take to protect yourself and your 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.

Unusual acting animals should be reported to local animal services for handling at:

- 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 their 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Walk the Walk Against Animal Cruelty event on November 14<sup>th</sup> at Tradition Square from 10 AM – 1 PM. **Rabies vaccinations will be available for \$10.** For more information about Walk the Walk Against Animal Cruelty and this affordable opportunity to get your pet vaccinated please go to [www.hsslc.org](http://www.hsslc.org).

For further information on rabies and rabies surveillance, go to the Florida Department of Health website: <http://www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/rabies/> and <http://www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/rabies/rabiessurveillance.html> or contact DOH-St. Lucie's Environmental Health office at 772- 873- 4931.

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