

**Mission:**

To protect, promote & improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county & community efforts.



Rick Scott  
Governor

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Vision: To be the Healthiest State in the Nation

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**HEALTH OFFICIALS URGE RESIDENTS TO AVOID CONTACT  
WITH WILD AND STRAY ANIMALS**

**WALTON COUNTY** – The Florida Department of Health in Walton County (DOH- Walton) urges residents to avoid contact with wild and stray animals to protect themselves from the risk of rabies exposure. In Florida, raccoons, bats, foxes and unvaccinated cats are the animals most frequently diagnosed with rabies. Other animals at high risk for rabies include skunks, otters, coyotes, bobcats, dogs and ferrets. Recently, a fox found in the Point Washington area in Walton County tested positive for rabies.

“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 Holly Holt, Administrator of the DOH-Walton.

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. DOH-Walton works with the Walton County Animal Control in responding to incidents of animal bites, tests animals for rabies through the Department of Health state laboratory, and quarantines animals as necessary. DOH-Walton can also advise victims of animal bites on where to obtain rabies vaccinations– 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 the Florida Department of Health in Walton County 850-892-8021, or Walton County Animal Control at 850-892-8682
- 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 the Walton County Animal Control at (850) 892-8682 for handling. Anyone who is bitten or scratched by wild animals or strays should report the incident to their

doctor immediately, as well Walton County Animal Control and their local health department. The contact number to report an animal bite to the Florida Department of Health in Walton County is 850-892-8021.

For further information on rabies, go to <http://www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/rabies/index.html>

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