

**Mission:**

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



**Rick Scott**  
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**John H. Armstrong, MD, FACS**  
State Surgeon General & Secretary

**Vision:** To be the **Healthiest State** in the Nation

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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 and 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, and stray or unvaccinated dogs and ferrets. Each year, DOH-Walton receives reports of rabid animals. In 2014, one rabid fox was reported in Walton County. Most recently, a fox with exposure to a pet was reported in August.

"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 Florida Department of Health in Walton County.

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 Walton County Animal Services 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 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 Walton County Animal Services at 850-892-8682 or the DOH-Walton Environmental Health Division at 850-892-8021.
- 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 Walton County Animal Services 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 as Walton County Animal Services and their local health department. To report an animal bite to DOH-Walton call 850-892-8021.

For further information on rabies, go to <http://www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/rabies/index.html>, or contact DOH-Walton at 850-892-8021.

The department works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts. Follow us on Twitter at [@HealthyFla](#) and on [Facebook](#). For more information about the Florida Department of Health please visit [www.floridahealth.gov](http://www.floridahealth.gov).

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