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DOH-ST. JOHNS COUNTY REMINDS RESIDENTS TO AVOID CONTACT WITH STRAY ANIMALS AND WILDLIFE

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St. Johns County, FL— In partnership with St. Johns County's Division of Animal Control, the Florida Department of Health in St. Johns County (DOH-St. Johns) urges residents to avoid contact with wild and stray animals to protect themselves from the risk of rabies exposure. Heighten awareness is encouraged because of a confirmed case of a rabid bat exposure to a St. Johns County resident this month which required lifesaving post-exposure treatment/vaccinations be performed by DOH-St. Johns County's staff.

The rabies virus can cause a nearly 100% fatal illness in humans and other mammals. Rabies is a preventable viral disease of mammals most often transmitted through the bite of a rabid animal. The rabies virus infects the central nervous system, ultimately causing disease in the brain resulting in death if not treated in a timely fashion.

The vast majority of rabies cases each year occur in animals such as raccoons, skunks, bats, foxes, and feral cats. The virus is present in some wildlife in Florida and can spread to unvaccinated pets, which then pose a high risk to the pet owner and their family. DOH-St. Johns County Health Department works with St. Johns County's Division of Animal Control in response to incidents of involving animal bites, testing of animals for rabies through the Florida Department of Health State Laboratory, and the quarantining of animals, as necessary.

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 and at-risk livestock.
 - Follow local leash laws. Do not allow your pets to run free. Keep pets and livestock secured.
 - Do not handle, feed, or unintentionally attract animals with outdoor food sources such as uncovered trash or litter.
 - Teach children to never 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 encounter people and pets.
 - If persons are bitten or scratched by wild or domestic animals, seek medical attention and report the injury to the DOH-St. Johns County Health Department at 904-209-3250.
 - If your pet or livestock are bitten by a wild animal, seek veterinary assistance for the animal immediately and contact St. Johns County's Division of Animal Control at 904-209-0746.
- Information can also be access via the following webpage: www.sjcfi.us/AnimalControl/index.aspx

Florida Department of Health is nationally accredited by the [Public Health Accreditation Board](http://www.ncaahq.org/) and works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts. For more information on rabies prevention and control, please visit the following DOH webpage: www.FloridaHealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/rabies/index.html. For more information about the Florida Department of Health in St. Johns County, please visit the following webpage: <http://StJohns.FloridaHealth.gov/index.html>