Florida Rabies Prevention & Control

Rabies Advisory Committee

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT RABIES

Rabies is a deadly viral disease that can be **PREVENTED BUT NOT CURED.** The virus attacks the brain of warm-blooded animals, including people.

How is rabies spread?

When an animal is sick with rabies, the virus is shed in the saliva and can be passed to another animal or a person, usually through a bite. Transmission may also occur if this saliva or the animal's nervous tissue enters open wounds, the mouth, nose or eyes of another animal or person.

What do rabid animals look like?

Animals with rabies may show strange behavior—they can be aggressive, attacking for no apparent reason, or act very tame (especially wild animals). They may not be able to eat, drink or swallow. They may drool because they have difficulty swallowing. They may stagger or become paralyzed. Rabies will kill most animals.

Which animals have been reported with rabies in Florida?

Rabid raccoons have been reported most frequently, followed by bats and foxes. Since the 1980s, rabid cats were reported more frequently than rabid dogs. Rabid bobcats, skunks, otters, horses, cattle and ferrets have also been reported.

What should I do if an animal bites me?

- Immediately scrub the wound with lots of soap and running water for five to ten minutes.
- Try to get a complete description of the animal and determine where it is so that it can be picked up by animal control staff for quarantine or rabies testing.
- Go to your family doctor or the nearest emergency room.
- Call your county health department or animal control agency with the animal's description and location. The animal will either be quarantined for ten days (if it is a dog, cat or ferret) or be tested for rabies.
- If you kill the animal, be careful not to damage the head, and avoid further contact with the animal even when it is dead.

What should I do to protect myself, my family and my pets from rabies?

- Have your veterinarian vaccinate all of your dogs, cats, ferrets and horses against rabies, and make sure you follow your veterinarian's instructions for revaccination.
- Avoid contact with wild or stray animals.
- Never feed wild or stray animals—avoid attracting them with outdoor food sources (like uncovered trash). Feed your pets indoors.
- Do not allow your pets to run free. Follow leash laws by keeping pets and livestock secured on your property.
- Support animal control in your community.
- If your animal is attacked by a wild, stray or unvaccinated animal, **DO NOT** examine your pet for injuries without wearing gloves. **DO** wash your pet with soap and water to remove saliva from the attacking animal. **DO NOT** let your animal come into contact with other animals or people until the situation can be handled by animal control or county health department staff.

(850) 245-4401
www.doh.state.fl.us/environment/medicine/rabies/rabies-index.html

Florida HEALTH