

Rabies Advisory Committee Position Statements

Translocation of Raccoons and Other Wild Mammals (updated January 2007)

The translocation of raccoons from Florida to Virginia in the early 1970s is considered a major factor responsible for the expanding epidemic of animal rabies in the eastern part of the country. Within the state, the translocation of nuisance raccoons accounts for epizootics in counties previously unburdened by animal rabies problems.

The Florida Rabies Advisory Committee supports the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission rule (68A-24.005, Florida Administrative Code) that prohibits the transport of wild-trapped, live raccoons within, into, or from Florida unless authorized by FWC permit due to the high prevalence of rabies in this species. The Rabies Advisory Committee strongly discourages the translocation of other rabies vector species.

Further, translocation of any wild animal species raises the possibility of the spread of other zoonotic diseases (e.g. plague) and should be discouraged.

Multi-year Rabies Vaccinations for Dogs and Cats (updated January 2008)

The Rabies Advisory Committee adopts the recommendation of the National Association of Public Health Veterinarians' Compendium of Animal Rabies Control, 2008 in regard to 3-year rabies vaccines for dogs and cats:

"Vaccines used in state and local rabies control programs should have at least a 3-year duration of immunity. This constitutes the most effective method of increasing the proportion of immunized dogs and cats in any population."

Additionally, the Rabies Advisory Committee considers animals vaccinated by a licensed veterinarian using a United States Department of Agriculture-approved multi-year vaccine to be currently vaccinated in accordance with the schedule for which the vaccine is licensed. Local governments cannot mandate revaccination of currently vaccinated animals except in instances involving post-exposure booster for rabies (Florida Statutes 828.30).

Managing Feral/Free-roaming/Un-owned/Stray Cats (updated January 2007)

The concept of managing free-roaming/feral domestic cats (*Felis catus*) is not tenable on public health grounds because of the persistent threat posed to communities from injury and disease. While the risk for disease transmission from cats to people is generally low when these animals are maintained indoors and routinely cared for, free-roaming cats pose a continuous concern to communities. Children are among the highest risk for disease transmission from these cats.

While free-roaming cats can be vaccinated against rabies, this does not address the ongoing need to provide them health care, medications and prevention of other zoonotic diseases. Should one of these cats bite or scratch a person, it would need to be captured and observed for 10 days for signs and symptoms of rabies, even if it had been previously vaccinated. If the cat is not found, the person bitten would need to undergo rabies post-exposure treatment (average cost >\$3,000 for previously unvaccinated individual).

In the past 10 years, cats were reported with rabies more frequently than dogs in Florida. The overwhelming majority of these cats were free-roaming animals. Human rabies in Florida was largely controlled by the removal of stray dogs when dog rabies was common during the first half of the 1900s.

Ideally, cats should have regular veterinary care and be maintained inside people's homes. Allowing cats to roam free is not in the best interests of the community's health and deliberate release or abandonment of feral or domestic cats is not sanctioned under Florida's conservation and cruelty laws. Domestic cats are not "indigenous" or native to Florida, and relocating and releasing non-native species into the wild is a violation of Florida Statute 379.231 and Florida Administrative Code 68A-4.005. Due to their adverse impact on wildlife, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission does not issue permits to make lawful either the release of cats to the wild or the establishment of feral/free-roaming cat colonies.

Exhibition, Sale, or Trade of Exotic or Wild Indigenous Mammals (updated June 2010)

The Rabies Advisory Committee condemns the practice of using most wild or exotic mammals for public contact activities (i.e., picture taking with Class II Wildlife).

Captive bred rabies vector species (e.g., raccoons, skunks, bats, foxes or bobcats) are being offered for exhibition, sale, or trade at a variety of venues (flea markets, pet fairs, exotic animal shows, swap meets, etc.). All persons in possession of these animals must be appropriately permitted by Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (Florida Statute 379.3761) and the Rabies Advisory Committee recommends that both vendors and purchasers be pre-immunized against rabies.

Due to the high potential for bites or scratches and difficulty of follow-up investigations, the Rabies Advisory Committee recommends that county government monitor all events of this type. Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission law enforcement officers can seize illegally possessed wildlife including wild caught rabies vectors (Florida Administrative Code 68A-6.002).