

Mission:

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



Rick Scott
Governor

Celeste Philip, MD, MPH
State Surgeon General

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

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Apalachicola, Fla and Port St. Joe, Fla — The Florida Department of Health in Franklin and Gulf Counties (DOH-Franklin/Gulf) 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. There has been an increase in the number of animal bites reported in both counties. As the daylight hours increase, people are prone to spending greater amounts of time outside in nature where the risk of coming into contact with wild animals is more likely.

“Rabies is a fatal disease and we are asking residents and visitors to exercise precaution. It is important not to handle wild animals, to be aware of unusual acting animals, and to keep pets vaccinated against rabies,” said Marsha Lindeman, Administrator of the Florida Department of Health in Gulf and Franklin Counties.

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-Franklin/Gulf works with local 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-Franklin/Gulf 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 Animal Services at (850) 670-4733 in Franklin County or (850) 227-1151 in Gulf County.
- Call your local animal control agency to remove any stray animals from your neighborhood.

Florida Department of Health in Gulf County

2475 Garrison Avenue • Port St. Joe, Florida 32456
PHONE: 850-227-1276 • FAX 850-227-7587

Florida Department of Health in Franklin County

139-12th Street • Apalachicola, Florida 32320
PHONE: 850-653-2111 • FAX 850-653-1727

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- 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 Animal Services at (850) 670-4733 in Franklin County or (850) 227-1151 in Gulf County. Anyone who is bitten or scratched by wild animals or strays should report the incident to their doctor immediately, as well as Franklin and Gulf Animal Services and their local health department. To report an animal bite to the health department, call (850) 653-2111 extension 7033 for Franklin County or (850) 227-1276 extension 8033 for Gulf County.

For further information on rabies, go to <http://www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/rabies/index.html>, or call (850) 653-2111 extension 7033 for DOH-Franklin or (850) 227-1276 extension 8033 for DOH-Gulf.

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