

November 15, 2021



HEALTH OFFICIALS ISSUE RABIES ALERT

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Ft. Walton Beach, Fla. –The Florida Department of Health in Okaloosa County (DOH-Okaloosa) issued a rabies alert for Niceville area. This is in response to a feral cat that tested positive on November 15, 2021.

All residents and visitors in Okaloosa County should be aware that rabies is present in the wild animal population and domestic animals are at risk if not vaccinated. The public is asked to maintain a heightened awareness that rabies is active in Okaloosa County. Alerts are designed to increase awareness to the public. Please be aware that rabies activities can also occur outside the alert area.

This rabies alert is for 60 days. The center of the rabies alert is the 32578 ZIP Code of Okaloosa County, and includes the following boundaries:

- From Redwood Ave to Hwy 85 N
- From College Blvd. to Choctawhatchee Bay

An animal with rabies could infect domestic animals that have not been vaccinated against rabies. All domestic animals should be vaccinated against rabies and all wildlife contact should be avoided, particularly raccoons, bats, foxes, skunks, otters, bobcats, and coyotes. Rabies is a disease of the nervous system and is fatal to warm blooded animals and humans. The only treatment for human exposure to rabies is rabies specific immune globulin and rabies immunization. Appropriate treatment started soon after the exposure will protect an exposed person from the disease.

Residents and visitors are advised to take the following precautions:

- Keep rabies vaccinations up to date for all pets and at-risk livestock.
- Do not allow your pets to run free. Follow leash laws by keeping pets and livestock secured on your property. If your pet or livestock are bitten by a wild animal, seek veterinary assistance for the animal immediately and contact Okaloosa Animal Services at Panhandle Animal Welfare Society (PAWS), 850-244-0196.
- Support animal control in efforts to reduce feral and stray animal populations.
- 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, including feral cats, with outdoor food sources such as cat or dog food, uncovered trash 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.
- Persons who have been bitten or scratched by wild or domestic animals should seek medical attention and report the injury to the DOH-Okaloosa at 850-833-9247.

For further information on rabies, go to www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/rabies/index.html, or contact DOH-Okaloosa at 850-833-9247.

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