

May 15, 2018

HEALTH OFFICIALS ISSUE RABIES ALERT

~Reminds residents and visitors should avoid contact with stray and wild animals~



Contact:

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Indian River County, Fla. – The Florida Department of Health in Indian River (DOH-Indian River) has issued a rabies alert for Indian River County. This rabies alert is for 60 days and includes the following boundaries:

- South of State Route 60 also known as 20th Street
- North of Oslo Road also known as 9th Street SW
- East of 66th Avenue
- West of US Highway 1

This rabies alert is in response to a stray cat that tested positive for rabies on May 15. While working in their yard, the victim was attacked by an adult, tricolor (browns), domestic, shorthaired cat on May 13. The victim defended themselves with a garden tool. It is important that you contact the DOH-Indian River immediately if you have been scratched or bitten by a cat meeting this description in the last two weeks in the geographic boundary of the rabies alert.

All residents of Indian River 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 Indian River County. Alerts are designed to increase awareness to the public, but they should not give a false sense of security to areas that have not been named as under an alert.

Health officials urge residents to protect themselves from the risk of rabies exposure by avoiding contact with wild and stray animals and to vaccinate their pets. “We strongly advise residents not to approach or feed wild and stray animals, and keep their pets vaccinated,” said Miranda Hawker, Indian River County Health Officer.

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. Free ranging domestic cats that compete with wild animals for food sources are at risk for getting rabies.

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.

Here are some tips to protect you and your pets from rabies:

- Persons who have been bitten or scratched by wild or domestic animals should seek medical attention and promptly report exposure to local animal control.
- Do not handle, feed or unintentionally attract wild or stray animals, including cats, by leaving pet food outside or garbage cans open.
- Keep rabies vaccinations up to date for all pets.
- Do not allow your pets to run free. Follow leash laws by keeping pets secured on your property.
- If your pet is bitten by a wild, stray or unknown animal, seek veterinary assistance immediately and report the incident to your local animal control agency. (See contact information below).
- Call your local animal control agency directly to remove any wild or stray animals from your neighborhood that are injured or demonstrate unusual behavior.
- Never adopt wild animals or bring them into your home. Call animal control for assistance rather than trying to nurse injured or sick wild or stray animals.
- 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.
- Spay or neuter your pets to help reduce the number of unwanted pets that may not be properly cared for or regularly vaccinated.
- Local animal control agencies in Indian River County coordinate the exposure investigation with the Florida Department of Health in Indian River County.

Animal Control Agency Contact Information:
 Indian River County Animal Control: (772) 226-3486
 City of Vero Beach Police Department: (772) 978-4600

For further information on rabies, go to the Florida Department of Health website: <http://www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/rabies/index.html> or contact Florida Department of Health in Indian River County at (772) 794-7440.

About the Florida Department of Health

The department, nationally accredited by the [Public Health Accreditation Board](#), works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.

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