

June 27, 2008

## Sarasota County health department urges rabies awareness

Due to a recent incident involving a rabid raccoon attacking a domestic animal, the Sarasota County Health Department is reminding residents to avoid contact with wildlife and to have their pets properly vaccinated. Rabies is a deadly viral disease that can be prevented but not cured. The virus is spread through saliva and can be passed to another animal or a person, usually through a bite. Infection may also occur if the saliva enters open wounds, the mouth, or eyes of another animal or person.

Although rabies has been reported in Florida wildlife, including raccoons, bats and foxes, it is not the policy of the health department to seek and remove animals that have not attacked from the environment.

To protect yourself, your family and pets:

- Have your veterinarian vaccinate all of your pets against rabies
- 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.

What should you do if an animal bites?

- 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 the health department or Animal Services with your description and location of the animal.
- If you kill the animal, be careful not to damage the head, and avoid further contact with the animal even when it is dead.

For more information, call Sarasota County Health department at 941-861-2900, or visit [www.sarasotahealth.org](http://www.sarasotahealth.org).