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DOH ENCOURAGES PET VACCINATIONS ON WORLD RABIES DAY

--Rabies is preventable, not curable--

TALLAHASSEE – In recognition of World Rabies Day, the Florida Department of Health (DOH) is emphasizing the importance of pet vaccinations to prevent rabies transmission on September 28, 2011 and all year. Rabies prevention can be exercised through ensuring adequate vaccination of pets and farm animals, avoiding contact with wild animals and educating individuals at risk.

Each year, approximately 30,000-40,000 U.S. residents are potentially exposed to rabies requiring human rabies post-exposure prophylaxis. In Florida, there were 72 cases of rabies as of August 31, 2011. The animal species carrying rabies most frequently in Florida are raccoons, bats, foxes and unvaccinated outside cats.

“Vaccination is the most crucial tool in fighting the spread of rabies among our animal population,” said DOH Division Director of Environmental Health Dr. Lisa Conti. “Because rabies can be prevented but not cured, being proactive in getting pets vaccinated is the key to safeguarding our community from this deadly disease.”

Rabies is caused by a virus that humans and other mammals can contract through certain exposure to the saliva or nervous tissue from a rabid animal, and is nearly always fatal without proper post-exposure treatment. When an animal is infected with rabies, the virus is shed in the saliva and can be passed to another animal or a person, usually through a bite. Transmission may also occur if this saliva or the animal’s nervous tissue enters open wounds, the mouth, nose or eyes of another animal or person.

DOH recommends the following tips for rabies prevention:

- Avoid direct human and domestic animal contact with wild animals.
- Ask your veterinarian to vaccinate pets and at-risk livestock and make sure you follow your veterinarian's instructions for revaccination.
- Do not allow your pets to run free. Follow leash laws by keeping pets and livestock secured on your property.
- Never feed wild or stray animals. Avoid attracting them with outdoors food sources like uncooked trash. Feed your pets indoors.
- If your animal is attacked by a wild, stray or unvaccinated animal, **DO NOT** examine your pet for injuries without wearing gloves. **DO** wash your pet with soap and water to remove saliva from the attacking animal. **DO NOT** let your animal come into contact with

other animals or people until the situation can be handled by animal control or county health department staff.

- Support animal control in efforts to reduce feral and stray animal populations.
- Bat-proof homes.

In the United States, the greatest achievement in rabies control and prevention occurred almost 50 years ago with effective implementation of dog vaccination, licensing and stray dog control. Despite being 100 percent preventable, it is estimated that 55,000 people die worldwide from rabies each year; approximately one person every ten minutes.

If an animal bites you, seek care promptly. Wash the wound thoroughly with soap and running water for five to ten minutes. Immediately visit your primary doctor, hospital or county health department for medical attention.

Additional information is available online at www.worldrabiesday.org, the DOH website at [http://www.doh.state.fl.us/environment/medicine/rabies/World Rabies Day.html](http://www.doh.state.fl.us/environment/medicine/rabies/World_Rabies_Day.html) and the Centers for Disease Control website at www.cdc.gov/rabies.

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