



Charlie Crist
Governor

Ana M. Viamonte Ros, M.D., M.P.H.
State Surgeon General

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 15, 2010

Contact: Cassie Garber
Office: 850-833-9233 x 2162 | Cell: 850-420-2198

OKALOOSA COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT ISSUES A RABIES ALERT FOR THE NICEVILLE AREA

OKALOOSA COUNTY – Dr. Karen Chapman, Director of the Okaloosa County Health Department, has issued a rabies alert for the Niceville region of Okaloosa County. This is in response to a raccoon that attacked a domestic pet and tested positive for rabies on January 5, 2010. Since that time there has also been a significant increase in reported wildlife attacks on domestic pets in the Niceville area.

The rabies alert is for 60 days. The center of the rabies alert is in Niceville and includes the following area boundaries:

- Northern boundary at College Blvd
- Eastern boundary at Forest Rd, intersecting with Rocky Bayou Dr and Rocky Bayou
- Western boundary at Hwy 85/Hwy 20 intersection and Boggy Bayou
- Southern boundary Choctawhatchee Bay

All citizens 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. 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.

An animal with rabies could infect other wild animals or 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.

The following advice is issued:

- All pets should have current rabies immunizations administer by a veterinarian.
- Secure outside garbage in covered containers to avoid attracting wild animals.
- Do not leave pet food outside. This also attracts other animals.
- For questions regarding the health of an animal, contact a veterinarian.
- Veterinarian staff and animal control staff should be alert for animals encountered with signs suspicious for rabies and use appropriate precautions, especially when working with unvaccinated animals.



Charlie Crist
Governor

Ana M. Viamonte Ros, M.D., M.P.H.
State Surgeon General

- Persons who have been bitten or scratched by wild or domestic animals should seek medical attention and report the injury to the Okaloosa County Health Department at (850) 833-9247 in Ft Walton Beach, and (850) 689-7859 in Crestview.
- Rabies is preventable when treatment is provided in a timely manner.
- Avoid contact with **all** wildlife, especially raccoons, bats, and foxes.
- No animal is too young to have rabies.
- For general questions pertaining to domestic animals contact PAWS (Panhandle Animal Welfare Society) at (850) 243-1525 or wild animals contact the Emerald Coast Wildlife Refugee at (850) 650-1880.

For further information on rabies, go to the Florida Department of Health website: <http://www.doh.state.fl.us/Environment/community/rabies/rabies-index.html>, contact the Okaloosa County Health Department, Environmental Health office at (850) 833-9247 in Ft Walton Beach, and (850) 689-7859 in Crestview, or visit their website: http://www.healthyokaloosa.com/Services/Environmental_Health.html.

#