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RABIES ALERT FOR THE NICEVILLE AREA IS LIFTED

OKALOOSA COUNTY – The rabies alert for the Niceville region of Okaloosa County has been lifted. The alert was issued on January 15, 2010 after public health officials received a positive rabies test result from a domestic pet.

Although guidelines indicate the removal of the alert at this time, Dr. Karen Chapman, Director at the Okaloosa County Health Department reminds everyone to continue to be aware of stray and wild animals and take necessary prevention steps to protect against and prevent the spread of rabies.

Public health officials recommend the following steps to protect pets and to prevent the spread of rabies:

- Vaccinate all dogs and cats (over the age of four months) by a licensed veterinarian.
- Vaccinate pet ferrets by a licensed veterinarian.
- Do not allow your pets to run free. If a wild animal bites your pet, seek veterinary assistance for the animal immediately.
- Avoid direct contact with unfamiliar animals. Stray cats and dogs may not have been vaccinated against rabies.
- Do not use your hands to break up a fight between animals. Even your own pet can bite you when it is trying to defend itself while fighting another animal.
- Do not pet, handle, or feed wild animals or unintentionally attract them with open garbage cans or pet food.
- Never adopt wild animals or bring them into your home. It is dangerous (and illegal) to do so.
- Do not try to nurse sick wild animals to health. It is common to want to rescue and nurse a hurt wild animal, but the animal may have rabies. Only qualified personnel, such as state wildlife officers and licensed wildlife rehabilitators, are legally allowed to handle these animals.
- If you are bitten by an unfamiliar animal seek care promptly. Wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water. Go to your family doctor or hospital for medical attention immediately.

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 Refuge at (850) 650-1880.

For more 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.

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