

## Health Officials Urge Residents to Avoid Contact with Wild and Stray Animals

Miami-Dade County health officials urge residents to avoid contact with wild and stray animals to protect themselves from the risk of rabies exposure.

In Florida, raccoons, bats, foxes, and unvaccinated cats are the animals most frequently diagnosed with rabies. Other animals that are at high risk for rabies include skunks, otters, coyotes, bobcats, and stray or unvaccinated cats, dogs and ferrets. Each year Miami-Dade County receives reports of rabid animals. In 2018, 11 rabid animals including 8 raccoons, 2 cats, and 1 otter of animals were reported in Miami-Dade County. Most recently, 1 raccoon with no known exposure to people/pets was reported in March 2019.

Rabies is a potentially fatal disease. It is important not to handle wild animals, to be aware of unusual acting animals, and to keep pets vaccinated against rabies.

Rabies is transmitted through exposure to the saliva and nervous tissue from a rabid animal through a bite, scratch, or contact with mucous membranes such as the eyes, nose, or mouth. The Florida Department of Health in Miami-Dade County works with Miami-Dade County Animal Services in responding to incidents of animal bites, tests animals for rabies through the Department of Health state laboratory, and quarantines animals as necessary. Rabies vaccinations to victims of animal bites is the only known effective treatment for rabies prevention in humans.

The following are steps you can take to protect yourself and your loved ones against rabies:

- Keep rabies vaccinations up to date for all pets.
- If your pet is bitten by a wild animal, seek veterinary assistance for the animal immediately and contact Miami-Dade County Animal Services at 3-1-1.
- Call 3-1-1 to report any stray dogs in your neighborhood or private property owners can hire a nuisance wildlife trapper for removal of wildlife. For a list of wildlife trappers, visit <https://public.myfwc.com/HGM/NWT/NWTSearch.aspx>
- **Do not** handle, feed, or unintentionally attract wild animals by leaving pet food outside, or garbage cans open.
- **Never** adopt wild animals or bring them into your home.
- 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.
- Persons who have been bitten or scratched by wild or domestic animals should seek medical attention and report the injury to the Florida Department of Health in Miami-Dade County at 305-470-5660.

Unusual acting animals should be reported to Miami-Dade County Animal Services at 3-1-1 for handling. Anyone who is bitten or scratched by wild animals or strays should report the incident to their doctor immediately, as well as Miami-Dade County Animal Services and their local health department. The contact number to report an animal bite to the Florida Department of Health in Miami-Dade County is 305-470-5660.