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HEALTH OFFICIALS EXPAND RABIES ALERT



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Bartow – The Florida Department of Health in Polk County (DOH-Polk) is extending a rabies alert, originally issued for the Bartow and Loughman area on November 18, and extended to include the Lakeland Highlands area on December 18. An additional 60 days will be added to the initial alert following a positive rabies test in a raccoon found in the northwest Lakeland area. This extension now includes boundaries for the following area:

North boundary – West Bella Vista Street

South and East boundary – Interstate 4

West boundary – Walker Road/Swindell Road

All residents and visitors in Polk 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 in Polk County. Alerts are designed to increase awareness to the public. Please be aware that rabies activities can also occur outside the alert area.

An animal with rabies could infect 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.

Residents and visitors are advised to take the following precautions:

- Keep rabies vaccinations up to date for all pets and at-risk livestock.
- Do not allow your pets to run free. Follow leash laws by keeping pets and livestock secured on your property. If your pet or livestock is bitten by a wild animal, seek veterinary assistance for the animal immediately and contact Polk County Sheriff's Office Animal Control at (863) 499-2600.
- Support animal control in efforts to reduce feral and stray animal populations.

- Spay or neuter your pets to help reduce the number of unwanted pets that may not be properly cared for or regularly vaccinated.
- Do not handle, feed, or unintentionally attract wild animals with outdoor food sources such as uncovered trash or litter.
- 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 DOH-Polk at (863) 519-8300.

For pets who have been bitten or scratched by a wild animal or to report unusual-acting animals, please contact Polk County Sheriff's Office Animal Control at (863) 499-2600.

For further information on rabies, go to <http://www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/rabies/index.html>, or contact DOH-Polk at (863) 519-8300.

About the Florida Department of Health

The department, nationally accredited by the [Public Health Accreditation Board](#), works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.