

## **Lee County Joins Global Rabies Prevention Effort**

Fort Myers, Florida, 9/3/09—This year Lee County Domestic Animal Services (LCDAS) is teaming up with agencies world-wide to bring public awareness about the dangers of rabies. The third annual World Rabies Day will be celebrated on September 28, 2009 but the deadly threat from this disease is present year round.

Rabies is a viral disease that can be transmitted to animals and humans. The disease is transmitted mainly by bite, but exposure may also occur through any broken skin or mucous membrane that comes in contact with saliva from an infected animal. Once neurological symptoms develop, rabies is fatal to both animals and humans. The good news is that rabies is easily preventable. Vaccination prior to possible exposure is a crucial part of health management of domestic animals, and is the single most important factor in rabies prevention according to the Alliance for Rabies Control.

It is estimated that every year 30,000-40,000 US residents are potentially exposed to rabies requiring human rabies post-exposure treatment. In the past six months approximately 800 bite cases were reported to the Lee County Health Department. The Department recommended 92 of the victims receive post exposure shots to prevent rabies. It is unknown how many bites go unreported in Lee County putting countless people at risk to contract or spread the disease.

Pet owners can protect themselves, their pets, and the community by having their animals vaccinated and by avoiding stray animals and wildlife. All bites should be washed with soap and water and seen by a doctor immediately. Prompt and appropriate treatment following a bite can stop rabies infection and/or prevent the disease in humans and animals.

In the United States, the greatest achievement in rabies control and prevention occurred half-a-century ago with effective implementation of dog vaccination, licensing, and stray dog control. Florida State Statute requires dogs, cats, and ferrets to be vaccinated for

rabies. Lee County Ordinance 09-20 requires all dogs, cats, and ferrets to be licensed as a method of rabies control as well as stray animal control.

Additional information about rabies is available online at [www.LeeLostPets.com](http://www.LeeLostPets.com) and at [www.worldrabiesday.org](http://www.worldrabiesday.org). A list of local veterinarians and low-cost clinics for vaccines is also available at [www.LeeLostPets.com](http://www.LeeLostPets.com).

*The World Rabies Day initiative, founded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Alliance for Rabies Control, a UK charity, aims to bring together relevant partners in an effort to address rabies prevention and control.*