

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY REPORTS FIRST CONFIRMED CASE OF ANIMAL RABIES IN 2014** *PUBLIC ADVISED TO VACCINATE PETS AND STAY AWAY FROM STRAY AND WILD ANIMALS*

STOCKTON (August 20, 2014) – San Joaquin County Public Health Services (PHS) has received confirmation from the California Department of Public Health Laboratory that a feral kitten tested positive for the deadly rabies infection. This is the first reported case of animal rabies in San Joaquin County since 2011 (refer to attachment). The feral kitten was from a rural area of the county and was exposed through a bat, per the lab report. Staff from PHS investigated the circumstances of this case to ensure that all known contacts (humans and domestic animals) exposed to this rabid animal received appropriate treatment or other intervention to prevent the spread of rabies. “This finding serves as a reminder that we must all take precautions when coming in contact with any stray, wild or unfamiliar animal, and be sure that our pets are up-to-date on their rabies vaccinations,” advised Dr. Alvaro Garza, San Joaquin County Public Health Officer.

The rabies virus affects the central nervous system and is preventable in animals through vaccinations, but, if left untreated, can be fatal to both unvaccinated animals and humans. This virus is carried in the saliva of infected animals and is usually transmitted to other animals and humans through a bite or scratch. It can also be transmitted when saliva from an infected animal comes into contact with open skin wounds or mucous membranes such as the eyes, mouth, or nose of another animal or person.

Although rabies is most often seen among wild animals such as bats, skunks, raccoons, coyotes and foxes, all warm-blooded mammals including dogs, cats, horses, and cattle are susceptible to infection of the rabies virus. In San Joaquin County, the most common animals found to be rabid are bats and skunks.

The first sign of rabies infection in an animal is usually a change in its behavior. Odd behavior may include skunks, bats, raccoons, or possums being seen out during daylight hours as opposed to their normal nocturnal nature. The animal may become unusually aggressive or unusually tame. It may lose fear of people and natural enemies; become excited or irritable; or, it may appear unusually affectionate and friendly. Staggering, convulsions, spitting, choking, frothing at the mouth, and paralysis are other symptoms the animal may display.

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**THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAYS TO AVOID EXPOSURE TO RABIES AND HELP PREVENT THE SPREAD OF THE DEADLY VIRUS ARE TO TAKE THE FOLLOWING PRECAUTIONS:**

- **AVOID** feeding, touching, or adopting stray or wild animals. Encourage children to immediately tell an adult if they are bitten by an animal. Watch for abnormal wild animal behavior. If you see an animal that is sick, injured, dead, orphaned, or behaving oddly, leave it alone and contact your local animal control office; do not handle the animal yourself (refer to attachment). When travelling abroad, take extra care to avoid animals (especially dogs in developing countries), where rabies is common.
- **VACCINATE** your pets (particularly dogs and cats), as well as horses and other domestic animals; and keep their rabies vaccinations and boosters up-to-date. Vaccinating your pets is important not only to keep your pets from getting rabies, but also to provide protection to you and your family in case your pet is bitten by an infected animal. Check with your veterinarian for the best type of vaccine and the proper vaccination schedule for your animals.
- **SUPERVISE** your pets regularly. Keep family pets enclosed at night to ensure that they do not stray from home or come in contact with wild animals. Pets too young to be vaccinated should be kept indoors and allowed outside only under direct observation. If your pet is bitten by a wild animal, seek veterinary assistance immediately. Call animal control to remove all stray animals from your neighborhood as these animals may be unvaccinated or ill (refer to attachment).
- **SECURE** your home and environment. Prevent bats and other wild animals from entering areas where they might come in contact with people and pets. Repair holes in walls, roofs and floors; board up any openings to your attic, porch or garage; and install screens on windows, doors and chimneys. Avoid leaving pet food, bird seed or other foods outside as this may attract wild animals around the home. Tightly cap or put away garbage cans to discourage foraging by wildlife.
- **REPORT IMMEDIATELY** any animal bite/scratch or any contact between a person or domestic animal and a stray or wild animal (dead or alive) to a city or county Animal Control Office, and consult a health care provider and/or veterinarian for appropriate follow-up (refer to attachment).
- **SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION** immediately and wash the exposure site very well if you are bitten by a suspected rabid animal or if its saliva comes in contact with your eyes, nose, mouth or a wound. Rabies immune globulin and vaccine can prevent the disease if obtained promptly following a rabies exposure.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ON RABIES, VISIT THE FOLLOWING WEBSITES:**

- **California Department of Public Health,** <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/discond/Pages/rabies.aspx>
- **U. S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,** <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/rabies>
- **World Rabies Awareness Day (September 28, 2014),** <http://www.cdc.gov/worldrabiesday/>

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**Attachment: Background Information Sheet – Rabies** (Signs and Symptoms, San Joaquin County Data and Local Animal Control Services Contact Information)

## ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### RABIES

#### SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF RABIES:

- **ANIMALS** - The first sign of rabies in an animal is usually a change in its behavior. It may become unusually aggressive or unusually tame. The animal may lose fear of people and natural enemies; become excited or irritable; or it may appear unusually affectionate and friendly. Staggering, convulsions, spitting, choking, frothing at the mouth, and paralysis are other symptoms the animal may display.
- **HUMANS** - The first symptoms of rabies could take one to three months or possibly longer to emerge following an exposure, and may be nonspecific (e.g. malaise, fever, or headache) and similar to the flu. There may be discomfort at the location of the bite. When symptoms do appear, they can range from brain dysfunction, anxiety, confusion, agitation progressing to delirium, abnormal behavior, hallucinations, and insomnia. Once clinical signs of rabies appear, the disease is nearly always fatal.

#### SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY DATA:

##### Number of Animal and Human Rabies Cases, San Joaquin County, 2004-2013

YEAR	NUMBER OF ANIMAL RABIES CASES	NUMBER OF HUMAN RABIES CASES
2004	7	0
2005	7	0
2006	3	1*
2007	3	0
2008	6	0
2009	1	0
2010	4	0
2011	4	0
2012	0	0
2013	0	0

\*Note: exposure occurred outside of the United States

Data Source: San Joaquin County Public Health Services Communicable Disease Data, 2004-2013

#### CITY AND COUNTY ANIMAL CONTROL SERVICES - CONTACT INFORMATION:

AREAS	PHONE NUMBER	WEBSITE
Escalon	(209) 838-9908	<a href="http://cityofescalon.org/departments/police/animal-control-service/">http://cityofescalon.org/departments/police/animal-control-service/</a>
Lathrop	(209) 941-7240	<a href="http://www.ci.lathrop.ca.us/asd/">http://www.ci.lathrop.ca.us/asd/</a>
Lodi	(209) 333-6741	<a href="http://www.lodi.gov/animalservices/">http://www.lodi.gov/animalservices/</a>
Manteca	(209) 456-8270	<a href="http://www.ci.manteca.ca.us/animal/">http://www.ci.manteca.ca.us/animal/</a>
Ripon	(209) 599-2102	<a href="http://riponpd.org/?page_id=9">http://riponpd.org/?page_id=9</a>
Stockton	(209) 937-8274	<a href="http://www.stocktongov.com/government/departments/police/animal.html">http://www.stocktongov.com/government/departments/police/animal.html</a>
Tracy	(209) 831-6364	<a href="http://www.ci.tracy.ca.us/?navid=488">http://www.ci.tracy.ca.us/?navid=488</a>
Unincorporated	(209) 953-6073	<a href="http://sjsheriff.org/">http://sjsheriff.org/</a>