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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY REPORTS FIRST CONFIRMED CASE OF ANIMAL RABIES IN 2015

PUBLIC ADVISED TO SECURE HOMES, VACCINATE PETS, AND AVOID STRAY AND WILD ANIMALS

STOCKTON (March 19, 2015) – San Joaquin County Public Health Services (PHS) reports a bat found in a home tested positive for the deadly rabies infection. For San Joaquin County (SJC), this is the first confirmed case of rabies in an animal this year. In 2014, a kitten was confirmed to have rabies.

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. The family's dog that did have contact with the bat is quarantined and being monitored.

“This incident serves as a reminder that we must all take precautions to secure our homes and environment to reduce coming in contact with any stray, wild or unfamiliar animals,” advised Dr. Alvaro Garza, San Joaquin County Public Health Officer. He added, “We also need to ensure that our pets are up-to-date on their rabies vaccinations.”

Rabies is preventable in animals through vaccinations and, if left untreated, can be fatal to unvaccinated and under-vaccinated animals. There is also a vaccine available for exposed people; however, for treatment to be effective, it should take place as soon as possible after exposure occurs.

Rabies is a deadly disease that affects the central nervous system. It can be spread from a rabid animal to a person or pet by a bite or scratch, even if very small or barely noticeable. 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 SJC, 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 in skunks, bats, raccoons, or opossums may include being out during daylight hours as opposed to their

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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.

TO AVOID EXPOSURE TO RABIES AND HELP PREVENT ITS SPREAD, PLEASE TAKE THESE PRECAUTIONS:

- **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.
- **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
- **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.
- **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. Also, when travelling abroad, take extra care to avoid animals (especially dogs in developing countries), where rabies is more common.
- **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.
- **SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION** immediately and wash the exposure site 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>

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