



County of Santa Cruz

HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY Public Health Division

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Press Release

For Immediate Release

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EXPERTS FROM COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH, ANIMAL SERVICES AND VECTOR CONTROL WARN THE PUBLIC ABOUT POTENTIAL RABIES EXPOSURES

Santa Cruz County, CA — Across California and locally in Santa Cruz County, there has been a concerning recent increase in the number of people exposed to rabid or potentially rabid animals, particularly bats. In 2025, 314 bats tested positive for rabies in California compared to 229 in 2024, a 37% increase. Locally, the number of rabid bats detected in Santa Cruz County has also increased. As of September 25, 2026, nine bats have tested positive for rabies in the county, compared with three positive bats during all of 2025.

While rabies detection in bats can vary from year to year, Santa Cruz County has experienced an upward trend over the past three years. Increased testing may have contributed to the higher number of bats testing positive for rabies.

Although rabies is relatively rare, it poses a serious threat to human and animal health. Because there is no known treatment for rabies once symptoms begin, nearly all people who contract rabies die within weeks of symptom onset. While rabies cannot be treated, it can be prevented.

"It is important to keep pets up to date on rabies vaccination to protect both animals and people. Both dogs and cats should be vaccinated," said Dr. Maris Brenn-White, Veterinarian for the Santa Cruz County Animal Shelter. "Vaccinated pets provide an important second level of defense against rabies for pet owners and other people."

Other prevention measures include:

- Avoid contact with wild animals, including bats.
- Keep dogs on leash at least 150 feet away from sick or dead animals.
- Know the signs of illness in bats: Bats active during the day, on the ground, or unable to fly may be sick.
- Call Native Animal Rescue at **831-462-0726** if you encounter a sick or injured wild animal.
- Contact Mosquito & Vector Control for a free home bat exclusion inspection at **831-454-2590**, especially if there is a history of finding bats indoors.

- Never try to remove or touch a living bat. Follow the guidance below for various bat situations:

If a downed or possibly dead bat is found:

1. Have someone watch to prevent anyone from touching it.
2. Get a box or bucket, gloves, and a broom or other tool.
3. Put on gloves, use the tool to nudge the bat to confirm dead or alive.
4. **If alive**, but doesn't/ can't fly away, cover it with box or bucket and contact **Animal Control** at **831-454-7200** to come pick up.
5. **If dead**, use the tool to push bat into the box or bucket, cover it, and, if possible, **bring to the Animal Shelter** (1001 Rodriguez St., Santa Cruz, CA 95062).
6. If unable to bring dead bat to shelter in a closed container, contact **Animal Control** at **831-454-7200** to come pick up.

Exposure to a rabid bat, or a bat that might have rabies, can occur anytime saliva or tissue from the bat enter the body, such as through a bite or scratch, or contact with a wound, mouth, nose, or eyes.

Bat bites are very small, and feel like a pinprick, so they may go unnoticed by a sleeping person. Anyone who wakes up to find a bat in the room, or finds a bat near a sleeping person, child, or pet, should treat it as a possible exposure and contact the Animal Shelter right away.

"Bat bites can be so small that people do not realize they have been bitten," said Dr. Lisa B. Hernandez, Santa Cruz County Public Health Officer. "If you think you may have been exposed, please do not wait. Seek medical care right away. Rabies is preventable, and early action saves lives."

If you are bitten by an animal, wild or domestic, the most important step after washing the wound is to seek urgent medical care. A medical provider can help determine whether you are at risk for rabies based on your injury and whether it's recommended to give preventative vaccines.

It is also important to report the bite to Animal Shelter at **831-454-7200** as soon as possible. If an assessment by Public Health confirms an exposure, owned animals must be isolated and observed for signs of rabies, and wild animals will be tested for rabies. Animal control officers can remove a wild animal from a house.

For more information on rabies prevention visit go.cdph.ca.gov/rabies.

For more information about the Santa Cruz County Animal Shelter visit scanimalshelter.org.

For more information about Mosquito and Vector Control visit mcv.santacruzcountycalifornia.gov.