



**COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO HEALTH AGENCY
PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Three Bats Test Positive for Rabies in San Luis Obispo County
*Test Results Prompt Reminder to Avoid Touching or Attempting to Capture Bats***

San Luis Obispo — The County of San Luis Obispo Public Health Department reminds residents to avoid contact with bats, following confirmation that three bats in San Luis Obispo (SLO) County have tested positive for rabies since June 2017. This number is higher than usual, as most years the Public Health Laboratory sees one or no confirmed cases of rabies in bats. It is not unusual for bats to carry rabies.

All three bats were brought to the Public Health Laboratory for testing after residents reported a sick or dead bat to County Animal Services or Pacific Wildlife Care. Two of the bats were found in Atascadero, and one was found in Cambria.

Most local cases of bats biting people have occurred when people attempted to capture or rescue a bat they believed to be injured or sick. Bats do not generally seek to bite people, but may do so when people handle them or attempt to capture them. Bats may also bite people if they inadvertently become trapped in a house or other building, or if they are disturbed by people.

"These are not cases of bats as aggressors," said Dr. Penny Borenstein, Health Officer of the County of San Luis Obispo. "Rather, these are cases of people initiating contact with bats. Given these recent rabies tests, we want to remind everyone to use general caution and avoid contact with bats. If you find a bat that appears lethargic or sick, don't touch it or attempt to rescue it: that puts you at risk for rabies, and it doesn't help the bat."

Bats that are active during the day, are unable to fly, or allow themselves to be approached by a person may be ill with rabies or another disease and should be especially avoided. The only way to confirm that an animal has rabies is to test it in a laboratory.

To avoid getting rabies or other diseases from a bat:

- Do not approach a bat, touch it, or attempt to capture or rescue it. This includes bats that appear healthy, bats that appear injured or sick, and bats that appear to be dead.
- Teach children to avoid contact with bats and other unfamiliar animals, even if the animals appear friendly or appear to need help.
- If you are bitten by a bat or other animal, wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water and immediately seek medical attention.

If you find a bat that appears to be injured, sick or dead—or if you are bitten by a bat—contact Animal Services at 805-781-4400 so the bat can be collected and tested for rabies at the Public Health Laboratory.

County of San Luis Obispo Health Agency

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Rabies is a viral disease most often caused by the bite of an infected animal. It can be fatal if not treated right away, but is 100 percent preventable with prompt treatment. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports the most common way for people to get rabies in the United States is through contact with a bat.

To learn more about rabies, visit www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Rabies.aspx.

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