



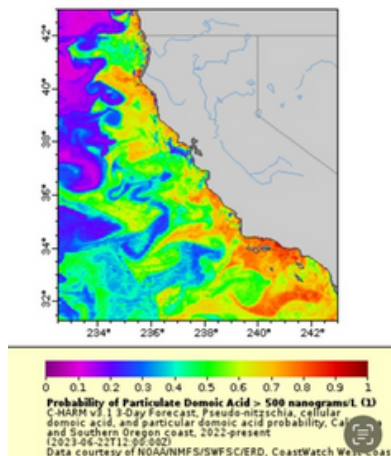
California Wildlife Center

Patient of the Week

August 11th, 2023



California HPAI Detections



Harmful algal blooms as of June 22, 2023, the start of the DA event.

But Can I Catch It? Zoonotic Disease and You.

Zoonotic diseases are ailments that can cross between people and animals and 60% of all infectious diseases are zoonotic. We've recently been able to see zoonoses firsthand with the spread of SARS-CoV-2 between people and animals. Other examples include HIV, MPox, Ringworm, West Nile, Plague, Lyme, and Rabies. Zoonoses may be spread through direct contact (feces, saliva, mucous, urine), spread via a vector (mosquitoes, fleas, ticks), through indirect contact (a surface that has been in direct contact), waterborne, or foodborne.

Fortunately for us, simple steps can stop the spread of most zoonotic diseases. They can be prevented through good hygiene, proper food safety, and avoiding the bites from vectors or sources. For example, you should not permit your cat to defecate outside and after cleaning your cat's litter box, you should always wash your hands (even if you didn't touch any feces) to prevent the spread of Toxoplasmosis.

Two of the most prevalent diseases we are currently facing at CWC are zoonotic. Both Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI H5N1) and Domoic Acid (Pseudo-Nitzschia DA) poisoning can affect humans.

The current outbreak of HPAI has killed 60 million birds—but just 136 people. The humans contracted HPAI through direct contact with sick birds' saliva, mucous, or feces. Symptoms of HPAI in animals include neurological behaviors, eye edemas, lethargy, and sudden death. HPAI has been found in other species as well with raccoons, mountain lions and bobcats affected in California. According to the CDC human symptoms are similar to a regular flu—fever, sore throat, and muscle aches.

At CWC, we insist that our staff and volunteers wear face masks, shields, gloves, and gowns when accepting new patients or when working with animals we suspect may be HPAI positive. We practice excellent hand hygiene and provide disposable gloves for all interactions with our patients. If you find a bird in distress, we recommend wearing disposable gloves or touching the bird only with a towel or cloth and then thoroughly washing your hands afterwards. When going through your regular life, the likelihood of coming in contact with a sick animal or contracting HPAI is incredibly rare and according to the CDC, there have been no human-to-human transmissions of H5N1.



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We are also currently dealing with a DA Event where hundreds of California sea lions have suffered from, and died from, domoic acid poisoning. They consumed contaminated shellfish and fish and the accumulation of the toxin in their bloodstream sickened these marine mammals. Humans cannot contract DA poisoning from sea lions, unless they eat an ill animal. However, we can suffer from DA poisoning if we eat infected shellfish or fish. During the peak of the DA outbreak, the California Department of Public Health advised against eating sport-harvested (not commercially grown) mussels, clams, scallops, and oysters from Santa Barbara County. That warning has since been lifted.

Sea lions suffering from DA poisoning will have seizures, appear to “stargaze,” vomit or may die suddenly. Human symptoms include vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal cramps and dizziness. Cooking or freezing does not eliminate DA in shellfish. DA can also affect birds, and it was such an instance in 1961 in California that is said to have inspired a scene in Hitchcock’s *The Birds*.

As humans take over more of the natural world and disturb previously untouched wilderness, the incidences of diseases spreading from animals to people will likely become more common. Melting permafrost at the Poles has already led to an anthrax outbreak in Russia in 2016 and as the ice caps disappear, they are apt to reveal previously frozen diseases and viruses and create pathways for extant zoonoses to spread further and faster.

At CWC, we communicate regularly with NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association), CDFW (CA Dept of Fish and Wildlife), CDPH (CA Dept of Public Health), LADPH (Los Angeles Dept of Public Health), USDA (US Dept of Agriculture) and our partners in wildlife rehabilitation in order to stay abreast of emergent diseases and to do our best to prevent the spread of zoonotic disease.