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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SUBJECT: TICKS AND DISEASE RISK

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**SANTA CRUZ COUNTY AND STATE OF CALIFORNIA PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCIES CAUTION
RESIDENTS ABOUT TICKS AND TICK-BORNE DISEASES**

SANTA CRUZ – These monsters are out to suck your blood long after Halloween is over!

Winter is a time of high adult tick activity in our coastal hills and residents should be aware when spending time outdoors. Santa Cruz County Mosquito and Vector Control (SCCMVC) staff and the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) collaborate to collect and test ticks in the County. Approximately 2% of adult Western black-legged ticks tested in recent years contain the bacteria that can cause Lyme disease. In 2015, there were 9 reported cases of Lyme disease in Santa Cruz County, just over the annual average.

The CDPH has also issued information about the newly discovered Pacific Coast Tick Fever and the tick associated with it, *Dermacentor occidentalis* (the Pacific Coast Tick). SCCMVC plans to conduct surveys for this tick species and will submit them to the CDPH for testing. Because of known disease risks and newly discovered agents like *Borrelia miyamotoi*, similar to Lyme bacteria, residents are advised to take precautions to protect themselves from tick bites.

Adult ticks climb to the tips of vegetation in cooler months, often alongside trails or paths, and attach themselves to hosts, such as deer, pets or humans that brush against them. Immature ticks (nymphs) are found in spring and summer on tree trunks, fallen logs, wooden benches and in leaf litter and feed on smaller animals, but they will also attach to people and pets. Ticks feed by sticking their mouthparts into the skin of their host and sucking blood. Infections such as Lyme disease may be transmitted when the feeding tick is attached for at least a day. Immature ticks are about the size of a pinhead, and may be missed without careful examination.

The risk of being bitten by ticks may be reduced with the following precautions:

- Wear long pants and long-sleeved shirts.
- Inspect yourself frequently while in tick habitat. Once out of tick habitat, thoroughly check your entire body and pets. Parents should examine their children, especially on the scalp and hairline.
- Use a repellent registered for use against ticks; always follow label directions. 20% DEET recommended.
- Stay in the middle of a trail and avoid logs, tree trunks, trail margins, brush and grassy areas.
- Shower and launder clothes soon after activity in tick habitat.

To reduce the possibility of infection, remove attached ticks as soon as possible. Gently and firmly grasp the tick close to the head and pull it straight out, preferably with a tick tool or with fine-pointed tweezers. Save the tick for identification. Ticks should be kept alive by placing the tick into a sealable bag or container with a moist cotton ball in a refrigerator or cooler. The person removing the tick should wash their hands before and after removal and apply antiseptic to the bite area. Insecticides, Vaseline, lighted matches or gasoline should not be used to remove ticks because these techniques are ineffective or unsafe. Anyone who develops symptoms after being bitten by a tick should consult his or her physician.

Painful redness that occurs less than 24 hours after a tick bite and does not expand is likely a local allergic reaction to the tick bite. Early Lyme disease also has a rash but the Lyme disease rash appears three to 30 days after the tick bite, is often painless, and spreads to greater than 5 cm in diameter. The spreading rash can be accompanied by flu like symptoms, such as fever and body aches. Lyme disease is treated with antibiotics and most patients recover without complications, particularly when the disease is diagnosed early. If left untreated, Lyme disease can progress to arthritis and in some cases



“Bullseye” rash of a patient infected with Lyme disease. Note that this rash does not always occur when someone is infected—it is important to look out for flu-like symptoms and check yourself for ticks.

serious nervous system problems.



Western black-legged ticks. Pictured from left to right: nymph, adult male, adult female. (Photo courtesy of CDPH).

**The Santa Cruz County Mosquito and Vector Control District can help with tick identification!
Just stop by!**

Contact information:

Phone: (831) 454-2590

Email: Pesthelp@agdept.com

Website: www.agdept.com under "Mosquito abatement/Vector Control"
640 Capitola Road, Santa Cruz CA 95062

Also visit: www.cdph.ca.gov for more information on ticks and tick-borne diseases.

Here's a direct link to the new "Keep Ticks Off You" easy guide to tick safety!

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/discond/Documents/KeepTicksOffYou.pdf>