



## **Rescue Hotline – 949-494-3050 ext. 9**

### **What to do during a domoic acid bloom if a disoriented or seizing sea lion or dolphin comes up on the beach?**

#### **Thing YOU CAN DO to help the sick sea lion or dolphin:**

**DO give the animal their space:** These are sick animals and need to rest peacefully on the beach to recover. Never attempt to encourage or push a marine mammal back into the water.

**DO get out of the water if a sea lion or erratically swimming dolphin is swimming around you:** These animals can have seizures and their behavior can range from comatose to being hyperexcitable, reactive or aggressive. They will bite if approached too closely, so it is safest for you and them to keep your distance.

**DO call Pacific Marine Mammal Center (Rescue Hotline: 949-494-3050 ext 9) to report sick sea lions and dolphins on the beach:** Our rescue teams will come out to assess and rescue animals in need. Please do not intervene with stranded marine mammal without speaking with our rescue team first.

**DO respect and listen to the Lifeguards and Marine Safety regarding public safety recommendations:** Busy summer times are taxing on Lifeguards and Marine Safety to keep the public safe. Reach out to Pacific Marine Mammal Center (949-494-3050) to report animals and for guidance on how to manage an aggressive sea lion on the beach. Please support efforts by encouraging the public to stay a safe distance away.

**Federal guidelines state that people must remain 50 yards away (4 to 5 car lengths away) from all marine mammals.**



**DO NOT do the following:**

**DO NOT coax/drag/push the sea lion or dolphin into the ocean or out of the surf zone:** This can harm the animal and you could get hurt or bitten.

**DO NOT touch, pet or attempt to feed the animal the animal:** Wild animals may bite!

**DO NOT harass the animal:** Respect the wildlife like you would a family pet

**DO NOT cover the animal:** It is unsafe to get this close to the wild animal and they do not use blankets in the wild.

**DO NOT pour water on the sea lion or dolphin:** They do not need to be wet even if it is hot out. Pouring water on them can make their compromised state worse and could cause them to have a seizure.

**DO NOT get close enough to take selfies:** You will be too close to the animal and you should never have your back to an unpredictable wild animal - you could get hurt!

**\*\*\*All of the above actions are a federal offense\*\*\***

Marine mammals are federally protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Violations can result in a civil penalty up to \$11,000 as well as criminal penalties up to \$100,000 and imprisonment of up to a year or both.

## **Information**

- High concentrations of domoic acid (a neurotoxin produced by the marine algae *Pseudo-nitzschia*) have been found in waters from Ventura to San Luis Obispo County
- The toxin moves its way up the food chain and negatively affects marine mammals that consume food source.
- Stranded sea lions may appear disoriented and agitated, and have symptoms such as head bobbing, foaming at the mouth, seizures, and loss of motor skills or comatose.
- Beachgoers should stay clear of stranded animals and keep their pets away from marine mammals. Animals can bite and may carry diseases that may be harmful to humans and pets.
- Stranded sea lions, dolphins, and other marine mammals can be reported to Pacific Marine Mammal Center at 949-494-3050 ext 9.

**Treatment:** Following rescue the animals will be evaluated and administered treatments to flush out the toxin and stop the seizures. With hospitalization and intensive treatment, it is possible to save some of these animals if they are brought into the hospital as soon after symptoms start. The treatment approach is threefold:

- 1) **Stop and control the seizures:** We do this with various anti-seizure medications (lorazepam and phenobarbital). These medications cause significant sedation which enables us to give the next treatment.
- 2) **Fluid therapy:** This flushes out the toxin through the patient's urine. Domoic acid is a hydrophilic ("water-loving") chemical and is excreted via the kidneys in the urine. By giving high volumes of subcutaneous fluids we can clear the toxin quickly and stop the seizures and brain damage. Most of the sea lions that present with seizures are adult females, which can be challenging (and unsafe for people) to administer subcutaneous fluids, so the sedation side effect of the anti-seizure medication can facilitate getting the fluids safely and effectively into the animal during the first few days of treatment.
- 3) **Anti-inflammatories** (typically steroids) to decrease brain damage associated with the seizures. Prolonged seizures can cause brain swelling, which can result in temporary or permanent blindness, and irreversible brain damage. This means some of the animals on the beach will not be able to see, which is one of the reasons there is a risk if touched they may be startled and bite.