

# Surge in sick, hungry sea lions off California coast puzzles marine biologists

July 5 2019, by Don Sweeney, The Sacramento Bee

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A rise in the number of ailing and malnourished sea lions along the California coastline has marine experts somewhat puzzled, KNTV reports.

About 130 sea lions and pups are now being treated at the Marine Mammal Center in Sausalito, Calif., KRON reported.

The center normally treats 50 to 70 young sea lions from April to June, said Greg Frankfurter, wildlife veterinarian at the facility, KNTV reported.

Some of the adult California sea lions may be suffering from domoic [acid](#) poisoning, related to toxic algae blooms in the ocean, according to the station. But experts aren't sure why they're also seeing more malnourished pups.

"Whether there is some underlying condition, we haven't been able to determine," Frankfurter said, KNTV reported. It may be related to the domoic acid poisoning cases in adults.

The upswing follows a similar surge in sea lion strandings in spring 2018 as well as a rise in California gray whale deaths in early 2019, KRON reported.

"We're seeing a lot of different animals being impacted from the gray whales that are coming in thin to the issues that we are seeing with

Guadalupe animals and the sea lions up and down the coast," Frankfurter said, according to the station. "It's definitely a sign of the ocean overall. All of it might (connect) to [climate change](#), relating to warming oceans."

Experts warn beachgoers to keep their distance from stranded or sick [sea lions](#), The San Francisco Chronicle reported.

"We are seeing more California sea lion strandings right now [?] both young pups that are starving as well as older animals affected by domoic acid poisoning, which could cause them to act strangely or be more aggressive," said Laura Sherr, a Maine Mammal Center spokeswoman, according to the publication.

In June, a sea lion bit a 13-year-old girl standing in the surf at Pismo Beach near San Luis Obispo, McClatchy previously reported. The [sea lion](#) appears to have been suffering from domoic acid [poisoning](#), the Marine Mammal Center said.

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