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Kidnapping attempts on children, women "rampant" on Southern California Streets, authorities say

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Police are investigating a surge of kidnappings and attempted kidnappings that have been occurring throughout the region, authorities said.

There have been at least three incidents in the last three days in the San Gabriel Valley, authorities said. But they are not limited to the area.

"We're having a rash of these right now in the Southern California area," said LA County Sheriff's Special Victim's Unit Sgt. Nancy Drake.

"They're different people, but for some reason it's just rampant."

A man tried to force a young woman into his car at gun point Thursday evening, authorities said. The incident occurred near the intersection of Lincoln Avenue and Orange Grove Boulevard about 8 p.m. Thursday.

"The suspect drove up to her, pointed a gun at her and told her to get in," said Pasadena police Lt. Chris Russ. "A bystander saw the look on the

victim's face, walked up to her and asked her if she was OK."

Russ said the man then drove off, possibly scared away by the bystander.

The man is described as a male Hispanic between 30 and 40 years old, with a close-shaven head and mustache. He was wearing a black ski jacket and blue beanie, and driving a black 1990s Nissan or Acura.

The man was armed with a silver-colored handgun, he added, but the woman was not hurt.

The suspect is still at large, authorities said.

Several other incidents have been reported in recent days:

On Wednesday a man pulled up in a gray Honda Civic alongside an 8-year-old boy as the child walked to Palm Elementary at about 8 a.m., in the 14700 block of Palm Avenue, authorities said.

The man got out of his car and grabbed the boy, but fled when the child's mother yelled. The mother was walking about 15 feet behind the boy, authorities said.

Authorities are still searching for the man, described as Hispanic with a thin mustache and a V-shaped scar under his left eye. He stands about 5 feet 4 inches and weighs about 200 pounds, authorities said.

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Also on Wednesday, a loan processor was kidnapped in the 14200 block of Chilcot Street in Baldwin Park, where he had an appointment. He was robbed and taken to a bank, where he was forced to withdraw money for his three attackers, authorities said.

Adelaido Cortez, 36, of Baldwin Park, was arrested along with his mother, Maria de Jesus Cortez, 66, both of Baldwin Park, on suspicion of conspiring against the loan officer.

Maria de Jesus Cortez has bailed out and her son was released pending further investigation, Baldwin Park police Lt. David Reynoso said.

Two other suspects remain at large.

On Jan. 7, a 17-year-old girl was sexually assaulted as she walked on Shadow Oak Drive in West Covina, on her way to Nogales High School.

The teen noticed a man walking behind her at about 6 a.m. He grabbed her from behind and pulled her into a clump of bushes where he assaulted her, authorities said.

She then continued to Nogales High, where she notified school officials.

The man was described as Hispanic, about 5 feet 8 inches with medium build and black, spiked hair.

The suspect remains at large, authorities said.

On Jan. 23, a 14-year-old girl was abducted

then assaulted as she walked in the 1200 block of Gradwell Street in Lakewood with a friend, authorities said. A man drove up next to them, shined a flashlight on them and tried to search them before punching one girl and forcing the other into his car.

He then fled and sexually assaulted her, before returning her to the area she was taken from, authorities said.

The man was described as a bald white male about 20 to 30 years old, standing about 5 feet 10 inches and weighing about 200 pounds, and is still at large, authorities said.

He was driving a white SUV with tinted rear windows.

No arrests have been in the case.

In mid-December police arrested a Huntington Park man accused of trying to force a 13-year-old Covina girl into his work van. The incident occurred in the 200 block of Puente Avenue.

The youngster managed to escape and notify her parents, who called police, authorities said.

Moses Matthew Rojas, 25, was arrested on charges related to the incident. His next court date is Feb. 13 at Pomona Superior Court.

Drake said several attempted kidnapping incidents were reported in the Long Beach area last fall.

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Authorities stressed the importance of being aware of surroundings, walking in groups and following instincts to help prevent future incidents.

"Kids should stay away from curbs, stay a good four large steps away from the street," she said.

Parents should also keep tabs and their children, know their routes to and from school and how long it takes, Drake added. Children should stay away from alleys, empty lots and empty buildings, and should never walk up to any car, she stressed.

Adults need to be aware of their surroundings and trust their instincts, she said.

"Run, scream, do something, you have to react immediately," she said. "Even if they have a gun, don't go with them. Run towards areas or buildings that are populated."

Women, she said, should always fight an attacker with knees, not hands, for more strength. Victims should also scream "fire" instead of "help" to draw attention to themselves.

"Always carry a cell phone with you to dial 9-1-1" she said. "Even if you can't make a call, dial something because the phones can be triangulated from the last call."

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