

## CVO BULLETIN TO WILDLIFE CARERS

# Australian bat lyssavirus infection in juvenile bats

January 2016

### Main points

- Always use Personal Protective Equipment<sup>1</sup> (PPE) when handling bats even if they appear healthy.
- Any person handling bats should be vaccinated against rabies.
- **DO NOT** allow bats of any age, whether healthy or sick to be handled or touched by children or other people who do not have a current rabies vaccination.

One adult and three juvenile grey-headed flying foxes rescued from a Central Coast flying fox roost on 9 November 2015 have tested positive for Australian bat lyssavirus.

The bats were found amongst numerous dead juvenile flying foxes under a roost on the Central Coast on 9 November 2015. The adult was showing neurological signs that were initially assumed to be related to a head injury, and it died the next day. The three juveniles were estimated to be 3 to 4 weeks old and ate well and grew until around 23 November when they began to show nervous system signs. One died and one was euthanised on 26 November and the third died on 27 November. All four flying foxes were submitted for laboratory testing for ABLV and all were confirmed positive for Australian bat lyssavirus.

NSW Health through local Public Health Units has assessed over 100 people who may have had contact with the infected bats. To date, nineteen people, some with significant exposures, have been provided post exposure treatment.

### Protecting yourself, family and friends

The best protection against being exposed to the virus is to avoid handling bats. If bats must be handled then appropriate PPE<sup>1</sup> including protective gloves and clothing, should be worn and the bat handler must be vaccinated.

### Reminder to Wildlife carers

1. Australian bat lyssavirus infection is more commonly detected in NSW in late spring-summer i.e. when bats are giving birth, (this may be due to higher rates of contact at these times).
2. Both adult bats and very young juvenile bats can be infected with lyssavirus.
3. All people handling bats must use appropriate PPE<sup>1</sup>, be vaccinated against rabies and trained in handling bats.
4. It is vital that unvaccinated family members or visitors are not allowed to handle any bats you are caring for.
5. A bat infected with Australian bat lyssavirus may display any of the following clinical signs:

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<sup>1</sup> personal protective equipment, such as puncture-resistant gloves and gauntlets, long sleeved clothing, safety eyewear or face shield to prevent mucous exposures, and a towel to hold the bat; and using a garden fork, spade or other implements to handle dead bats. Human deaths have occurred following exposure of non-vaccinated people to infected bats in Australia.

- Abnormal behaviour such as excitation / agitation / aggression
- Paralysis or paresis
- Unprovoked attacks
- Unusual vocalisation
- Inability to fly, unable to hang
- Convulsions / seizures / tremors
- Loss of condition, loss of appetite

Any bats showing nervous signs should be taken to a veterinarian. If your veterinarian is unavailable call the Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline on 1800 675 888.

6. If you are in contact with the saliva of any bat, or are scratched or bitten, regardless of whether or not the bat is showing clinical signs of illness, you should:
- immediately wash any wound thoroughly with soap and water for at least five minutes - proper cleansing of the wound reduces the risk of infection
  - apply an antiseptic with anti-virus action such as povidone-iodine, iodine tincture, aqueous iodine solution or alcohol (ethanol) after washing
  - seek medical attention as soon as possible to care for the wound and to assess whether you are at risk of infection

For further information about preventing infection in humans, please call your local public health unit on 1300 066 055 or visit the [NSW Health website](#).

7. Do not allow contact between pets and the bats you are caring for. If a bat becomes ill, keep it isolated from other bats in your care. Rabies vaccination (at owners expense) can be used for pets that have interacted with potentially infected bats. See more information on [Australian bat lyssavirus](#).

### Management of bats in care

- Ensure all handlers are vaccinated fully against rabies
- **DO NOT** allow bats of any age to be handled or touched by children or other people who do not have a current rabies vaccination (even baby bats may be infectious).
- Always use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE<sup>1</sup>) when handling bats regardless of the presence or absence of clinical signs
- Isolate sick bats from other bats
- **DO NOT** allow dogs or other animals to contact bats. If they do have contact seek veterinary advice including post exposure vaccination
- **If a bat under your care becomes unwell, contact your veterinarian**

### Disposal of carcasses and contaminated PPE/equipment

Bat carcasses must be disposed of by either:

- in routine clinic biological waste,
- deep burial where dogs cannot dig them up,
- or check with your local council as to which local council service may be used

Contaminated disposable PPE should be double bagged and placed in the waste.

### More information

- [DPI website](#).

- NSW Health has a factsheet that has important information regarding human health risks for Australian bat lyssavirus – [Rabies and Australian Bat Lyssavirus Infection factsheet](#) or phone NSW Health on 1300 066 055.
- [NSW Health website](#).
- Work Health and Safety Responsibilities (phone Workcover Authority of NSW on 131050).
- WorkCover Queensland - [Safe Bat Handling video](#).

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