



INT15/109577

Circular 2015/04

**Australian Bat Lyssavirus
Risks to the Public from Exhibited Captive Bats**

Dear Exhibitor

The Department would like to highlight the potential risk to the public from exposure to the Australian Bat Lyssavirus when visiting facilities that display bats.

Exhibitors of bats need to assess and manage the risks to ensure the public are not exposed to Australian Bat Lyssavirus. In 2014 the owner of a Queensland Bat Sanctuary was prosecuted by Workcover for allowing members of the public to have contact with captive bats.

Ways risk can be minimised include:

- Making sure all bat enclosures have either:
 - a) a glass viewing area, or;
 - b) if they have a wire viewing area - a stand-off barrier and/or double wiring (with the two layers at least 10cm apart) that prevents members of the public touching a bat climbing on the front of the enclosure.
- Preventing members of the public from directly contacting a bat being handled by a keeper. The public need to be either standing behind a barrier or a second keeper needs to be present to ensure members of the public are kept away and to intercept a bat if it takes flight.
- Utilising double wiring on the walls and ceiling of all outdoor bat enclosures to reduce the risk of infection of captive bats from wild bats.
- Not housing bats in walk-through enclosures.
- Displaying signs warning the public of the risk of exposure to lyssavirus and how to protect against the risk.
- If any members of the public are bitten or scratched – washing all wounds thoroughly with soap and water for at least 5 minutes and seeking immediate medical advice.

It is also recommended that exhibitors who hold bats:

- Ensure that all staff members are fully vaccinated against rabies and have a rabies antibody titre measured every 2 years. An inadequate titre is <0.5IU/mL and a booster dose of the vaccine is required. Alternatively, booster vaccination can be given every 2 years without determining the antibody titre.
- Ensure all staff use suitable personal protective equipment.
- Test any dead bats for Australian Bat Lyssavirus.
- Quarantine any new bats entering the facility for at least 7 days and observe them for signs of Australian Bat Lyssavirus (including weakness, inability to fly or hang properly, paralysis, seizures or tremors, changes in vocalisation, agitation or aggression).
- Assume a bat is infected with Australian Bat Lyssavirus if signs are observed and commence a veterinary investigation.

For further information on Australian Bat Lyssavirus please go to:

<http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/biosecurity/animal/humans/bat-health-risks>

Yours sincerely



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NSW Chief Veterinary Officer

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