



Lyssavirus (ABL)



What is ABL?

Australian bat lyssavirus (ABL) has been found in several species of flying foxes and insectivorous bats. It was first identified in Australia in 1996. Previously 6 types of lyssavirus were recognised throughout the world, 5 of which are found in bats. The most well known lyssavirus is rabies, which is closely related to ABL. There have been 2 deaths from ABL in Australia.

How is it spread?

ABL is usually transmitted to humans via bites or scratches that provide direct access of the virus in bat saliva to breaks in the skin and exposed tissue and through mucous membranes (eyes, nose and mouth).



The virus cannot survive more than a few hours outside the bat. ABL is not spread by bat urine, faeces or blood. Fruit soiled with bat saliva, urine or faeces is not a risk but should be washed before eating.



There is no risk of ABL infection from eating flying foxes that have been thoroughly cooked.



Who is at risk?



Anyone who handles bats is potentially at risk through scratches, bites and direct saliva contact to the mucous membranes of your mouth, eyes or nose.



Handling bats

Do not touch or try to rescue bats. If you find a sick or injured bat, contact your nearest wildlife rescue service for assistance.

Anyone who regularly handles or cares for bats (members of bat care groups, wildlife officers, vets etc) should be vaccinated. Routine vaccination is not recommended for other people.

If involved in handling bats you should:

- ensure you are vaccinated before handling bats
- cover any unhealed cuts or wounds on your skin
- wear puncture proof gloves and long sleeved clothing of thick material and protective glasses
- avoid handling any new bat in your care for 24 hours and if it displays signs of illness take it to the vet
- pick up sick bats by wrapping them in thick cloth to reduce the chance of being bitten or scratched
- take soap and water when rescuing bats so you can thoroughly clean any bites or scratches as soon as possible

If you are scratched or bitten:

- Wash the wound thoroughly for a minimum of 5 minutes with soap under

running water as soon as possible. Proper cleaning of the wound is the most effective way to reduce transmission of the virus. Apply an antiseptic solution after washing if possible (i.e. povidone-iodine).

- If you get bat saliva in your mouth, eyes or nose you should flush the area with water.
- Cover the wound and seek medical attention *immediately*. Vaccination is still protective against ABL if given promptly.
- Even if already vaccinated, medical attention should be sought as soon as possible for further (treatment) vaccine.

Symptoms of ABL in a sick bat

- muscular weakness such as partial wing or hind limb paralysis;
- difficulty or inability to fly;

- unusually docile or unusually aggressive;
- depressed and unresponsive.

Any bats with these symptoms should be reported to your nearest wildlife rescue service.

NB Some infected bats may not exhibit any unusual behaviour.

Disposal of dead bats

If the bat had any of the above symptoms your nearest wildlife rescue service should be contacted for appropriate disposal of the body. Other bats may be disposed of by placing them in a bag and burying.

Although ABL is not thought to live long in a dead bat, precautions should be taken to avoid being scratched when disposing of the body.

For more information contact your nearest Centre for Disease Control.

Darwin	89228804
Katherine	89739040
Nhulunbuy	89870282
Tennant Creek	89624259
Alice Springs	89517548

Further fact sheets and treatment protocols are available at:
<http://www.nt.gov.au/health/cdc>