

Staying safe around Bats

Bats, including flying foxes, are native throughout Australia and play an important role in the ecosystem.

Grey-headed Flying-Foxes and other bat species can carry a rabies-type infection called Australian Bat Lyssavirus.

People should not touch bats unless properly trained and vaccinated. Any contact with bats requires urgent medical attention.

Serious health risks associated with Australian Bat Lyssavirus (ABLV)

ABLV is a rabies like virus transmitted from bats to humans. Infection with the virus is invariably fatal. There have been three cases in Australia since 1996, all of which were fatal. The last case occurred in Queensland in 2013.

Transmission of the virus is commonly through a bite or scratch, but also through exposure to bat saliva through the eyes, nose or mouth. If treatment is delayed until after the onset of the symptoms, there is no known cure and the condition is fatal.



Grey-headed Flying-fox Photographer: Robert Griffith

Prevention

Bats must only be handled by an appropriately trained and vaccinated person.

Infected bats may not show any symptoms of illness.

People who come across a dead, sick or injured bat must not touch the bat and should contact Fauna Rescue's 24-hour Helpline on 8289 0896 to arrange for removal of the bat.

Children and bats

Special care should be taken to educate children in regard to health risks associated with bats.

Children should be advised that they must not touch living, injured or dead bats and that they must immediately tell an adult if they are bitten or scratched by a bat.

Bat handlers

Bat handlers should be vaccinated against rabies and tetanus.

Regardless of previous vaccination status, if bitten or scratched bat handlers must seek medical attention immediately.

FIRST AID

If you are scratched or bitten by a bat, or come into contact with bat saliva,

IMMEDIATELY



CLEAN

the contact area with soap and water for at least 5 minutes



APPLY

antiseptic such as povidone-iodine



CONTACT

a doctor or hospital emergency department



COMMENCE

a course of post exposure prophylaxis if necessary



Other health risks associated with bats

Hendra virus

Hendra virus is thought to be passed from bats to horses following ingestion of matter contaminated by bat urine, saliva or birth products. Human fatalities have been reported following exposure to respiratory secretions or blood from infected horses.

Direct bat-to-human transmission (or human-to-human transmission) has not been known to occur.

Within South Australia, there have been no reported cases of Hendra virus infection in humans or horses although it has been detected in bats.

Menangle virus

Menangle virus was first detected in New South Wales in 1997 in a piggery. It is thought that the virus was spread to pigs from exposure to infected faeces from a nearby colony of flying foxes. Two workers at the piggery tested positive to Menangle virus after contracting a flu-like illness. There have been no further cases of Menangle virus infection in animals or humans

Summary

Within South Australia, all species of bats are protected under the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972. Whilst bats play an important role in the ecosystem, they are also associated with illness in humans and other animals.

Members of the public are urged not to touch or handle bats. It is important to apply preventative and first aid measures to safeguard against the serious health risks associated with bats, including seeking immediate medical attention in the event of coming into contact with bats.

More information

For more information contact;

MEDICAL

- Your doctor
- SA Health on 1300 232 272
(24 hours / 7 days)

ANIMAL HEALTH

- Biosecurity SA on 8207 7900

FAUNA RESCUE

- Fauna Rescue of South Australia Inc
24 Hour Help Line on 8289 0896

ENVIRONMENTAL

- Department of Environment, Water and
Natural Resources on 8204 1910

For more information

Health Protection Programs

SA Health

Telephone: 08 8226 7100

Fax: 08 8226 7102

Email: HealthProtectionPrograms@health.sa.gov.au

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