

### Media statement

16 September 2019

#### Stay away from bats!

Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service's (SCHHS) public health unit is urging locals and visitors not to touch bats, even if they seem sick, injured or dead.

Public health physician Dr Rosie Muller said drought conditions and recent bushfires across the state had impacted the habitats and food sources of bats, meaning it would be more common to find injured, sick or dead bats.

"Bats can be affected by hot weather, fires and smoke, and people may want to help them, however, we urge members of the public to avoid touching bats," Dr Muller said.

"Bats can infect people with Australian Bat Lyssavirus (ABLV). ABLV is like the rabies virus, and infection can be fatal. All bats are potential carriers of Australian Bat Lyssavirus (ABLV) which is why only trained and vaccinated professionals should handle them.

"ABLV can be spread from bats to people through a bat bite, scratch or by getting bat saliva in the eyes, nose or mouth.

"Parents should make sure children also know not to touch bats.

"We frequently need to treat people who have been bitten or scratched by a bat even though they had put on thick gloves or used a towel to move the bat. Bat claws and teeth are very sharp and can penetrate gloves," she said.

If you (or your child) come across a bat:

1. Do not touch the bat, even if it seems to be dead.
2. If the bat seems sick, injured or stuck contact a wildlife rescue organization which has vaccinated, trained bat carers or the RSPCA 1300 ANIMAL (1300 264 625).

If you or someone you know has been bitten or scratched by a bat, or bat saliva has entered your eye, nose or mouth:

- 1) Wash the affected area gently and thoroughly with soap and water for at least five minutes
- 2) Apply an antiseptic (alcohol-based or iodine-based) to the area of the scratch or bite
- 3) Promptly contact:
  - Your GP
  - 13HEALTH information line on 13 43 25 84
  - SCHHS public health unit on 1300 017 190.

#### Facts about Australian Bat Lyssavirus

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Australian Bat Lyssavirus (ABVL) is a rabies-like virus carried by bats. It can be spread to humans by the saliva of infected bats. This occurs when the bat saliva comes in contact with human mucous membranes (eyes, inside the nose or mouth) or broken skin, or through bat bites or scratches.

ABLV infection in humans is rare; there have only been three cases in Australia that occurred in 1996, 1998 and 2013. In all three cases, the infected person died.

Anyone who has been bitten or scratched by a bat will require a series of injections to prevent ABLV infection, regardless of how long ago the bite or scratch occurred. People previously vaccinated against rabies still require a shorter series of injections. Appropriate vaccination after exposure prevents development of ABLV disease.

There is no evidence of ABVL being transmitted to humans from an animal other than a bat.

For more information, see Queensland Health's ABLV fact sheet  
<http://conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthCondition/condition/14/217/10/australian-bat-lyssavirus>

**ENDS**

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