

# Australian Bat Lyssavirus (ABLV)

## Information for pet owners

### What is Australian Bat Lyssavirus?

ABLV is a virus of flying foxes which can, in rare cases, cause fatal neurological disease in people and other animals. All Australian bat species can carry ABLV, though it is present in less than 1% of the wild bat population. In sick, injured and orphaned bats the presence of ABLV can be much higher, with estimated reports up to 30%. ABLV is closely related to rabies, which is only found overseas.

### Signs and transmission

ABLV causes inflammation of the brain which is fatal. Signs can take from 10 days to several months to develop. Behavioural changes are commonly seen, so affected bats are usually found in unusual situations; on the ground, in fences or away from roosting camp during the day. It is important to remember that even bats which appear healthy may still be carrying the virus. The virus is transmitted to people or other animals by bites or contamination of scratches or open wounds, or even via the eyes, nose or mouth with infected bat saliva.

### ABLV infection in humans

There have been three human cases, and two horse cases of ABLV in Australia; all were fatal. There have been no known cases in dogs or cats or other animals to date. Horses, dogs, cats and other pets may potentially be exposed to ABLV through contact with bats, and, it is possible that exposure may lead to infection in a pet, which may, although unlikely, then transmit the disease to a human.

### Occurrence in the Northern Territory

There have been six cases of ABLV confirmed in bats in the NT since 1997. There have been no infection of humans or other animals. Flying foxes are found all over the Top End.

### Protecting animals and people

There is no treatment once an animal shows signs of ABLV. Where possible, prevent pets and other animals coming into contact with bats. Post-exposure prophylaxis treatment is available for exposed pets and humans. Only vaccinated, experienced handlers wearing protective clothing should ever handle bats.

### What should I do?

- If you find a sick, injured or dead bat, contact your local vet or Wildcare Inc on 8988 6121.
- DO NOT attempt to handle bats. Make sure children and animals are kept away.
- If you suspect your pet has been bitten or scratched by a bat, contact your local vet.
- If you have been bitten or scratched by a bat, immediately wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water for 5 minutes, apply an antiseptic and seek urgent medical advice.

If you think an animal is ill with ABLV, or a pet has been bitten or scratched by a bat or other animal known or suspected to be infected with ABLV, contact the Emergency Disease Watch Hotline on 1800 675 888.

ABLV is a notifiable disease and all suspect cases should be reported to the Chief Veterinary Officer.