

Australian Bat Lyssavirus (ABLV)

Information for veterinarians

What is Australian Bat Lyssavirus (ABLV)?

ABLV is a lyssavirus closely related to rabies, which causes fatal encephalitis in mammals. The virus is considered present in all populations of Australian bats. ABLV prevalence in the normal bat population is 1%, however in sick, injured or orphaned bats it may be as high as 30%.

Transmission of ABLV

ABLV is transmitted via scratches, bites or mucous membrane exposure to infected bat saliva.

Occurrence in the Northern Territory

There have been six reported cases of ABLV in bats in the NT since 1997. There have been no known infections of humans or pets in the NT. In QLD, ABLV has been confirmed in cases of three people and two horses, and all cases were fatal.

Clinical signs in bats

ABLV causes central nervous system disease, and should be considered in any bat with;

- paresis (weakness)
- inability to fly, hang, swallow or move
- seizures or tremors
- unusual vocalization or incessant licking
- behaviour changes, including agitation, aggression or approaching people.

It should be noted clinical presentation may be unreliable, with one previous case in the NT being found caught in a wire fence with none of the above signs. The incubation period is variable and may take many months. Once neurological signs are seen there is a rapid progression to death.

Advice to clients

If a human has been scratched or bitten by a bat, seek urgent medical advice.

If a pet has had suspicious contact with a bat, immediately wash the wound with soap and water and apply antiseptic. Always arrange for retrieval of the bat for testing if possible and safe to do so, as a negative ABLV test result will exclude the risk of transmission and may reduce the need for post-exposure prophylaxis.

Case management

All people handling bats should be rabies vaccinated with a current protective antibody titre.

If you are presented with a dead bat, contact the DITT Berrimah Veterinary Laboratories (BVL) or regional Animal Biosecurity Office to arrange testing of the bat.

If you are presented with a live bat which had suspicious contact with a human or pet,

- euthanase the bat (gaseous anaesthesia may aid safe handling)
- refrigerate (not freeze) the whole bat carcass
- contact DITT to arrange testing ASAP.

If a client reports a sick/injured bat in public, contact Wildcare on 8988 6121.

For information on the management of cases involving contact between pets and bats, consult the NT ABLV Guidelines for Veterinarians, available at nt.gov.au

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



These guidelines are for veterinarians to assist in the safe management of incidents involving pets having contact with bats, with the resulting potential for these animals to acquire Australian Bat Lyssavirus infection (ABLV).

Please note: Veterinarians, veterinary assistants and carer's handling bats should have a current Rabies vaccination.

For more information contact your regional Animal Biosecurity Office

- Darwin 8999 2035
- Katherine 8973 9716
- Tennant Creek 8962 4458
- Alice Springs 8951 8181



 Join the Biosecurity Facebook Group @biosecNT

For more information, go to [nt.gov.au](https://www.nt.gov.au)
Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade

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