

Australian Bat Lyssavirus (ABLV)

THE
TERRITORY

Waiting for ABLV test results

Australian Bat Lyssavirus (ABLV), a disease very similar to rabies, is known to be present in the bat population in Northern Australia. On occasion, bats will develop clinical ABLV disease which can result in behavioural changes which may bring infected bats into contact with domestic pets and other animals.

Domestic pets which approach infected bats on the ground are at high risk of being exposed to infection with ABLV. Although ABLV infection has only been reported in people and horses, there is a risk that an infected pet may potentially transmit ABLV to another animal or person. This risk is believed to be extremely low and to date. Transmission from an affected pet to a human has never been reported.

Due to the serious nature of the disease, and to ensure that the appropriate action can be taken, it is important to determine if the bat was or was not infected with ABLV. Suspect ABLV is an emergency animal disease notifiable to the Chief Veterinary officer (CVO).

If your pet has been exposed to a bat your veterinarian can arrange for euthanasia and laboratory testing of the bat to exclude the possibility of ABLV infection. ABLV exclusion testing is performed free of charge by the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade (DITT).

All human exposure to bats must be reported to the Northern Territory Centre for Disease Control (CDC) on 8922 8044.

Caring for pets which have been exposed to a bat

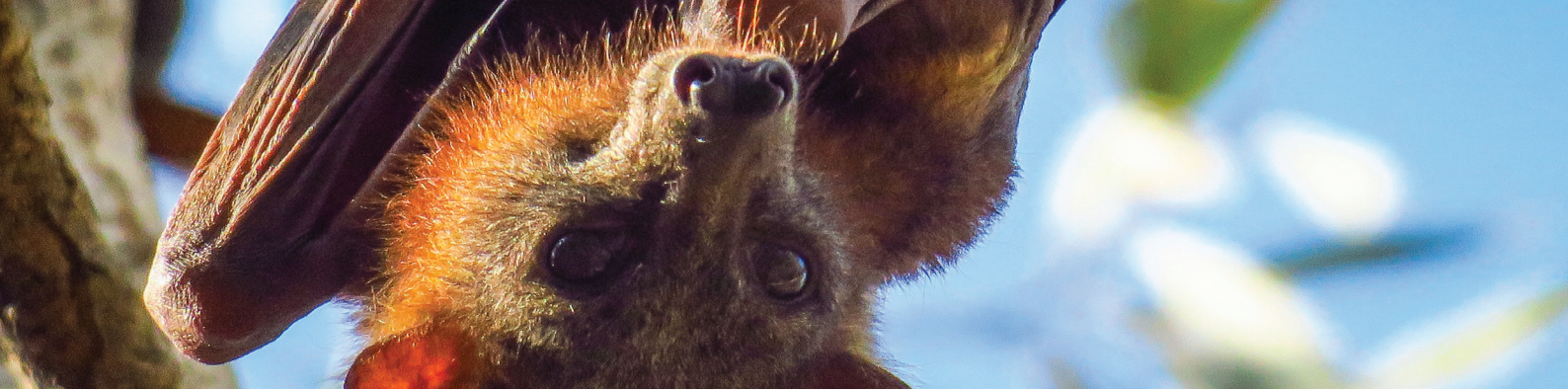
Precautions which should be taken while waiting for test results include;

- Isolate exposed pets from other pets and people. This includes preventing movement off the property.
- Avoid being bitten or scratched by exposed pets until ABLV has been ruled out. Prevent children having close contact with these pets or their wastes.
- Observe your pet closely and immediately notify your veterinarian of any changes in its health. Signs of ABLV in pets would be expected to be consistent with swelling of the brain, and could include unusual behaviour changes or neurological signs.

After receiving the bat test results

If the test result is negative, there is no risk to the exposed pet and the case is closed.

Situations have occurred where the pet may have been bitten by more than one bat; it is important to note that the risk of exposure may not be resolved by the testing of a single bat.



If the test result is positive, or the bat was unable to be tested, there is a potential risk that the pet may have been infected with ABLV and could present a risk of transmitting ABLV infection to the owner or other pets. If such a transmission was to occur, the potential outcomes could be extremely serious.

If your pet has been injured by an ABLV positive bat, the CVO will issue an order to you under the *Livestock Act* to undertake actions to mitigate the risk of ABLV developing and impacting on other animals and people.

There are three options available to owners in these situations:

Vaccination

The DITT strongly recommends that pets exposed to ABLV positive bats undergo vaccination with inactivated rabies vaccine. Vaccination should occur as soon as possible after the contact with the bat in order to reduce the risk of clinical ABLV infection.

- The vaccination course can be started while test results for the bat are still pending, especially when the pet has had a highly suspicious exposure (e.g. the pet was seen to be bitten or scratched by an obviously sick bat).

The rabies vaccine may only be used under a special permit from the Chief Veterinary Officer which requires:

- Two doses of vaccine given 5 to 7 days apart.

- The vaccine is administered by an authorised veterinarian.
- Vaccinated animals must be microchipped.
- The pet is added to a permanent register held by the DITT.

The owner is responsible for all costs associated with the vaccination. This would generally require a minimum of two consultations with a private veterinarian, plus the cost of two doses of vaccine and micro-chipping. The pet should be closely monitored for 60 days following vaccination.

Monitor the animal for up to 2 years

The pet owner is permitted to keep the animal at home however they must continue to observe for signs of ill-health for up to two years. This option does not lower the potential risk of ABLV infection developing and the owner must report to the DITT if they notice any clinical signs suggestive of ABLV disease. The animal will be euthanased if ABLV disease develops.

Euthanasia

To avoid any further potential risk of humans or pets contracting ABLV infection from the exposed pet, the owner may choose to authorise euthanasia of the pet, especially in those cases where it can be established that a suspicious contact occurred.

The responsibility for costs associated with the case rests with the owner.

Human health

If you have concerns about a person's health at any time, seek medical advice from your general practitioner, local hospital emergency department or the Centre for Disease Control.

Further information

NT Centre for Disease Control

t: Business hours 08 8922 8044 After hours 08 8922 8888 and ask for the on-call Centre for Disease Control doctor
e: health.nt.gov.au

Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade

t: Business hours 08 8999 2035 After hours 1800 675 888
e: nt.gov.au/environment/animals/australian-bat-lyssavirus-and-your-pet

or contact your regional Livestock Biosecurity Office

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

For more information, go to nt.gov.au
Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade

Last updated August 2022