

Staying safe around bats

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

Grey-headed Flying-Foxes and other bat species can carry a rabies-type virus called Australian Bat Lyssavirus (ABLV). Infected bats may not show any symptoms of illness.

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

Serious health risks associated with ABLV

ABLV is transmitted from bats to humans. There have been three human cases in Australia since 1996, all of which were fatal. The last case occurred in Queensland in 2013.

Transmission of ABLV is most common through a bite or scratch. It can also occur through exposure to bat saliva through the eyes, nose, or mouth. ABLV is fatal if it is not treated before the onset of symptoms.

ABLV is unlikely to survive outside an animal for more than a few hours. Transmission of ABLV following exposure to bat faeces, urine, or blood is unlikely. Living, playing, or walking near bat roosting areas does not pose a risk of contracting ABLV if bats are not touched. Contact with any bat fluids should be avoided.



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 15 minutes

APPLY

antiseptic such as povidone-iodine

CONTACT

a doctor or hospital emergency department

COMMENCE

a course of post exposure prophylaxis if necessary

Prevention

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

People who come across a dead, sick, or injured bat must not touch the bat. They should immediately contact Fauna Rescue SA's Bat Hotline on (08) 8486 1139 or Bat Rescue SA on 0475 132 093 to arrange for removal of the bat.

Children and bats

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

Children should be advised that they must not touch living, injured, or dead bats. They should be told that they must tell an adult immediately 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, bat handlers must seek immediate medical attention if bitten or scratched.

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. Immediate medical attention should be sought in the event of coming into contact with a bat.

Further information

Medical

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

Animal Health

- > Biosecurity SA on (08) 8207 7900

Bat Rescue (24 hours)

- > Fauna Rescue of South Australia Inc. Bat Hot Line on (08) 8486 1139
or
- > Bat Rescue SA on 0475 132 093

Environmental

- > Department for Environment and Water on (08) 8204 1910

For more information

Health Protection Programs
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RUNDLE MALL SA 5000
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Telephone: 08 8226 7100

www.sahealth.sa.gov.au



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