

25 August 2023

## CHIEF VETERINARY OFFICER BULLETIN

# Australian bat lyssavirus confirmed in a black flying fox in Byron Bay- August 2023

Australian bat lyssavirus (ABLV) was detected in a subadult female black flying fox from Byron Bay on 17<sup>th</sup> August 2023. Brain, salivary gland, and buccal swabs all tested positive on ABLV (Pteropid) PCR at the NSW Department of Primary Industries' Animal and Plant Health Laboratory at the Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute (EMAI). Confirmatory testing was performed at the Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness (ACDP), with brain samples testing positive on Australian bat lyssavirus- pteropid real time PCR and the fluorescent antibody test for Lyssavirus antigen.

The bat was found on the ground by a wildlife carer and brought to a wildlife hospital showing neurological signs including paresis, agitation, attempts to bite its own wing, a decreased swallowing reflex, increased respiratory effort and hypothermia. The bat was euthanised and submitted for ABLV exclusion.

NSW DPI and Local Land Services District Veterinarians worked with NSW Health and National Parks and Wildlife Services to manage the risks associated with the case.

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## Other information

ABLV is notifiable in NSW under the NSW Biosecurity Act. The last diagnosed case in NSW was in August 2022.

ABLV is related to rabies, and can spread to humans and horses, causing fatal disease. ABLV causes neurological signs in bats, however infected bats may show no clinical signs. Sick and injured bats are more likely to be infected with ABLV than the normal wild population. Clinical signs may include:

- Bats in unusual locations during the daytime (i.e. not in normal roosts)
- Bats on the ground or low in a tree with inability to take off or fly normally or appear to be injured
- Behavioural signs (e.g. aggression, docility, shivering and salivation)
- Respiratory difficulties, change of voice
- Weakness or paralysis

## How to protect yourself

The best protection against being exposed to ABLV is to avoid handling bats. Only people who have been vaccinated against rabies and trained in handling bats should ever handle bats or flying foxes. Any people handling bats should be vaccinated for rabies and have titres checked every 2 years. If you have been bitten or scratched by a bat, regardless of whether it is showing clinical signs, you should:

- Immediately wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water for at least five minutes - proper cleansing of the wound reduces the risk of infection
- Apply an antiseptic with anti-virus action such as povidone-iodine, iodine tincture, aqueous iodine solution or alcohol (ethanol) after washing

- Seek medical attention as soon as possible to care for the wound and to assess whether you are at risk of infection
- Have the bat tested for ABLV if possible

If you are at risk of infection, you may require prophylactic treatment consisting of a combination of rabies immunoglobulin and rabies vaccine. There is no available treatment for ABLV once symptoms have started so it is important to seek medical advice as soon as possible.

If you suspect a bat has ABLV, or if your pet has been bitten or scratched by a bat, call the Emergency Animal Disease Hotline on 1800 675 888

If you have been bitten or scratched by a bat, seek immediate medical attention. For more information on ABLV and human health, call your local public health unit on 1300 066 055.

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