



Media Release

Heat wave: Avoid handling distressed bats to protect yourself against lyssavirus

Thursday, 7 December 2023

Hunter New England Local Health District residents are reminded to avoid handling or touching injured, or dead, wildlife including flying foxes and microbats to protect themselves against infection from viruses including Australian bat lyssavirus which is very dangerous to humans.

Dr David Durrheim, Public Health Physician with the Hunter New England Public Health Unit, warned that the forecasted high temperatures coming into the weekend can result in unwell bats that may fall out of trees, prompting people to pick them up or attempt to rescue them.

“Do not attempt to touch or handle flying foxes or microbats, dead or alive,” Dr Durrheim said.

“If you see a dead bat in a public area, contact your local Council and ask them to dispose of it.

“If you see a bat in distress, please call your local wildlife rehabilitation organisation, in circumstances where untrained people attempt to rescue bats they often do more harm than good.”

Contact details for local wildlife rehabilitation organisations can be found at the NSW Department of Planning and Environment wildlife rehabilitation [website](#) or [download](#) the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) wildlife rescue app.

“If you or anyone in your family are bitten or scratched by a flying fox or microbat, wash the wound immediately and thoroughly with soap and water for at least 15 minutes, and apply an antiseptic with anti-virus action, such as povidone-iodine. Seek medical attention as soon as possible to assess whether you are at risk of infection,” Dr Durrheim said.

NSW Public Health Units will work with your doctor to assess your risk and where indicated, will arrange for rabies post-exposure treatment to be delivered to your GP or hospital. The post exposure treatment is crucial for people bitten or scratched by bats because there is no effective treatment once the symptoms of Australian bat lyssavirus commence.

You should never attempt to assist or handle bats unless vaccinated against rabies, trained, and wearing protective equipment. In the event of an extreme heat stress or starvation event affecting bat populations, people should follow the directions given by wildlife rescue coordinators.

More information regarding viruses carried by flying foxes and microbats is available on the [NSW Health website](#).

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