

Bats & Human safety

Although bats and flying foxes may appear nice and friendly, they carry a variety of bacteria and viruses which can be harmful to humans if infected. Despite thinking you are doing the right thing by helping an injured bat, there are a number of potential health concerns to consider.



What diseases do bats carry?

1. Australian bat Lyssavirus

Is a virus that is closely related to the classical rabies virus found overseas. Humans can get lyssavirus from the saliva of infected bats; most commonly, through scratches and bites. Once infected, lyssavirus can cause rabies-like symptoms in humans and invariably result in fatal encephalitis (infection and inflammation of the brain).

In Australia, there have been 3 documented cases – all of which were in Queensland and all were fatal. Lyssavirus is easily avoidable by not handling any bats (even if injured) unless you are trained, using personal protective equipment, and are vaccinated against rabies.

2. Hendra virus

Is a virus whose natural host is the flying fox which can infect horses that are exposed to the infected flying fox's saliva, urine or faeces. Although there is no evidence of humans obtaining Hendra virus from bats, humans can become infected from close contact with the body fluids of infected horses.

3. Histoplasmosis

Is a condition caused by a soil-based fungus found in high organic content soil as well as bird and bat faeces. Humans become infected after breathing in the microscopic fungal spores from the air. It is a rare infection in Australia; however, has been found in all states of Australia except Tasmania. Less than

5% of people infected show signs which can include respiratory illness, exhaustion, gastrointestinal symptoms, weight loss, anaemia, and meningitis.

4. Leptospirosis

Is a bacterial disease transmitted via the urine of infected animals. Rodents and cattle are the main carriers of the disease; however, bats may also transmit infection to humans. The most effective way to prevent getting infected from bats is to avoid coming into contact with bats, particularly with any broken skin or with the eyes, nose or mouth.

5. Salmonella

Is a bacterial disease that causes gastroenteritis that may be found in animal faeces. Although most infections are caused through consumption of undercooked meat, infection may also be acquired from close contact with animals including bats.

What should I do if I find a bat?

If you find an injured bat, do not attempt to help the animal yourself under any circumstances. The risk is too high!

If a bat needs help, contact either:

- The RSPCA on **1300 130 372**
- The Flying-fox Rescue Release Noosa Inc **(07) 5485 3394**

Additionally, contact the Cooroora Veterinary Clinic if you suspect that your pet may have been infected by a bat. Signs to look out for include:

- Weakness or hind limb paralysis
- Seizures
- Unusual vocalisation
- Changes in behaviour, including agitation and aggression

What should I do if bitten or scratched by a bat?

In the case that you are bitten or scratched by a bat, you should:

1. NOT scrub the wound – but immediately wash the wound gently but thoroughly for at least 5 minutes with water and antiseptic (eg. povidone-iodine, iodine tincture, aqueous iodine, alcohol)
2. If bat saliva gets in the eyes, nose or mouth, or broken skin, flush the area thoroughly with water
3. Immediately seek urgent medical advice from a doctor or nearest hospital as post-exposure rabies vaccinations and other treatments may be necessary