

The Australian Veterinary Association Limited

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Professor Charles Guest
Chief Health Officer of Victoria
Department of Health and Human Services
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Email: charles.guest@dhhs.vic.gov.au

CC: Professor Charles Milne, Chief Veterinary Officer of Victoria
charles.milne@ecodev.vic.gov.au

Dear Professor Guest,

Access to free-of-charge rabies vaccinations for veterinary staff

Veterinary clinics in Victoria and across Australia perform an enormous amount of pro-bono work related to wildlife, including administering antibiotics, surgery and euthanasia, which comes at a significant cost to clinics.

Injured microbats and flying foxes are common types of bats that wildlife carers present to veterinary clinics. Australian bats carry a number of disease agents that may be transmitted to people including Australian bat lyssavirus (ABLV), which has caused fatalities in people. Infection with ABLV has been confirmed in all species of flying fox and in insectivorous bats. The virus causes a fatal encephalitic disease.

Under Workplace Health and Safety legislation, those handling bats are required to have a pre-exposure to rabies vaccine because the risk of contracting a disease when working with bats is extremely high. Recently, the AVA has received reports that some veterinary clinics have refused to provide treatment to injured bats that are presented by wildlife carers because clinic staff have not been vaccinated.

Currently, the pre-exposure rabies vaccination is available free of charge to volunteer Australian wildlife handlers and we strongly support extending this free program to veterinary staff. Veterinary teams work to ensure the welfare of all animals that are presented to them and providing access to a free pre-exposure to rabies vaccine will allow more opportunities to assess and treat bats in need of urgent veterinary care.

I look forward to receiving your response in this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

Susan Chandler
Executive Officer