

Australian bat lyssavirus update communiqué

7 June 2013

A property in the Southern Downs area remains in quarantine after a horse tested positive to Australian bat lyssavirus (ABLV) on Friday 17 May 2013.

A second horse confirmed infected

A second horse on the quarantined property has been confirmed as infected with ABLV. This horse became ill and died before ABLV was confirmed in another horse on the property.

The horse was noticed as off-color, dull and mildly ataxic (wobbly) on Thursday 2 May 2013. Over the next few days, the ataxia became worse and a private veterinarian attended to the horse. On Monday 6 May 2013, the horse was recumbent and having seizures and was euthanased by the veterinarian.

A remaining sample from the sick horse was tested for ABLV and returned positive results to the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test.

While this horse showed clinical signs of ABLV infection first, it is now the second horse to be confirmed as infected with ABLV.

Management on the quarantined property

Biosecurity Queensland has undertaken an exposure assessment on remaining animals on the quarantined property. Information from this assessment combined with advice from Chief Veterinary Officers from around Australia has led to an animal management program of quarantine, isolation and vaccination.

Several animals identified as having potential contact with ABLV have been vaccinated against rabies virus. Current information suggests that the rabies vaccine provides cross protection against ABLV infection. On-going monitoring of these animals will continue until it is established that the animals have mounted an adequate immune response following the vaccination protocol.

No animals on the quarantined property are showing signs of illness or a change in behaviour.

Infection control

It should be assumed that any Australian bat could potentially carry ABLV. Infection of bats is rare; research indicates that it is present in less than 1 per cent of free living bats. However sick, injured or orphaned bats have a higher rate of infection.

As ABLV has the potential to be transmitted from infected bats to any mammal, animal owners are advised to take all reasonable steps to keep their animals away from bats. There is treatment available if an early response is taken. If an owner suspects that their animal might have been bitten or scratched by a bat, they should contact their local veterinarian.

To protect against a number of diseases able to be caught from animals it is important to ensure sound hygiene and biosecurity measures are used with all contact with animals, particularly contact with their saliva, blood and other body fluids and with associated equipment.

Only people who have been vaccinated against rabies and wearing appropriate personal protective equipment should handle bats and preferably those that have been trained in, or have experience with handling bats.

Any person who has been scratched or bitten by a bat should wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water for at least five minutes. If available, apply an antiseptic such as iodine or alcohol (ethanol) after washing and **seek medical advice urgently**.

If bat saliva comes into contact with the eyes, nose, mouth or broken skin, flush the area thoroughly with water and **seek medical advice urgently**.

Further information

ABLV is a notifiable disease. If you suspect that an animal may be infected with ABLV you must report it to Biosecurity Queensland by calling:

- 13 25 23 (business hours) or
- Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline on 1800 675 888 (24-hour hotline).
- Follow Biosecurity on Facebook and Twitter (@BiosecurityQld).

For more information about ABLV, visit Biosecurity Queensland's website www.biosecurity.qld.gov.au

For information about human health concerns regarding ABLV, contact Queensland Health on 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84).

For information about managing ABLV risks at workplaces, contact Workplace Health and Safety Queensland on 1300 369 915 or visit www.worksafe.qld.gov.au

For more information about bats and environmental issues, including safe netting of fruit trees and damage mitigation permits visit the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection website, www.ehp.qld.gov.au or phone 13QGOV (13 74 68).

Rick Symons
Chief Veterinary Officer
Biosecurity Queensland

Australian bat lyssavirus update communiqué

7 June 2013

