

Simple steps to avoid health threats from Bats and Flying-foxes

In Australia there are two main health issues associated with Bats and Flying-foxes:

Australian Bat Lyssavirus (ABL)

Lyssavirus is similar to rabies and is only transmitted through bat saliva from being bitten, scratched or licked by an infected flying-fox or bat. Continuing community education will reduce the threats of catching Lyssavirus. In the United States people live each day with rabies. Simple key messages taught to the community and especially to children from a very early age are to

- Stay away from bats and tell an adult if you are touched, bitten or scratched by a bat.
- Immediately wash any scratch or bite for five minutes under running water and
- Seek immediate medical advice because treatment for Rabies will also cure Lyssavirus.
- If you see a bat in need of help – call your local wildlife rescue group whose vaccinated volunteers are specially trained to look after bats and flying-foxes. Contacts are available on or via the **Wildlife Rescue** free mobile phone App.

Hendra Virus

Hendra virus is not directly passed from flying-foxes to humans. Instead bats are believed to be the main source of Hendra, which is passed to horses. Hendra virus infection in humans is secondary and a result of exposure to affected horses.

The plan to disperse and move on flying-foxes may have detrimental effects on these animals. Loud noises and other dispersal techniques stress flying-foxes. It is known that stress is one of the factors that can cause an increase in shedding of the Hendra virus thereby increasing the health risks to the community and horses. Some tips for horseowners include:

- Cover water and feed troughs in the vicinity of flowering or fruiting trees
- Move troughs away from under trees particularly when they are fruiting or flowering (Some of the favoured trees for flying-foxes are figs, eucalypts, blood woods, spotted gum, bottlebrush and blackbutt)
- Consider temporary electric fencing around trees where flying-foxes are known to visit to roost or feed.
- Move horses away from areas containing fruiting or flowering trees when flying-foxes visit.
- Look up and be aware of when your horse paddock trees are starting to fruit or flower—this is the time when flying-foxes are most likely to visit. Flying foxes return to their habitual campsites before the October and November birthing season.
- Cut bunches of seeds off Cocos Palms.