

Bat Awareness and Public Health



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Lots of population health work going on:

- Strong healthy communities partnerships with municipalities, including Squamish
- Planning 3rd annual Sea to Sky Congress for 2020
- My Health My Community Round 2 starting in early 2020
- Etc.

However....

Why are we talking about this?

- Recent death from rabies following bat exposure in BC
- Highly effective preventive treatment available
- Public health responsible for following up on high risk human bat exposures
- Most bat exposures occur in rural areas of VCH



Bats in BC

- There are at least **16** species of bats living in BC, **11** of which can be found in the lower mainland
- Bats are essential members of local ecosystems
- Conservation concern:
 - Habitats at risk
 - White-nose syndrome



Bats in BC – seasonal exposures



- Most reports of bat exposures in BC occur in **spring** and **summer**
 - Bats hibernate or migrate in the **winter**
 - People spend less time outdoors in the **fall** and **winter***

What is Rabies?

- Rabies is caused by a virus
- Transmitted through saliva
- Infects the brain and nervous system



If not treated in time, rabies infection
is almost always fatal

Bats and Rabies



- Bats are the **ONLY** reservoir of rabies in British Columbia
- In 2018, 7.6% of bat specimens **submitted to the animal testing lab** tested positive for rabies in BC¹

Estimated that only 0.5% of bats in BC carry rabies

Rabies transmission



- Rabies can be transmitted through bites, scratches, or mucous membrane exposure to bat saliva
- Requires a **direct exposure** to a bat

Risk of Rabies in BC

- While there are an estimated 59,000¹ human deaths from rabies globally each year, **only 3 human cases of rabies have been reported in BC since 1924**²

Nonetheless – the disease is **severe** and we have a **highly effective preventive treatment**

What to do if you have a direct exposure?

- Immediately **wash** the wound well with soap and water for 10 min.
- Seek urgent **medical attention** from your doctor or local public health unit



What to do with the bat?

- If the bat is dead:
 - Environmental Health Officers* can submit for testing
- If the bat is alive:
 - Don't try to capture if you have not had previous contact with the bat
 - Call local pest control

What is Rabies Post-Exposure Prophylaxis?

- Wounds or clear site of exposure:
 - Rabies immunoglobulin (blood product)
- Vaccine series
 - Three doses of rabies vaccine on day 0, 3, 7*



Heather Hazzan, *SELF Magazine*. <https://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/Pages/Immunizations-Image-Gallery.aspx>

Other notes

- If pet exposed and no direct contact with human - contact veterinarian for assessment
- More information on managing bat pests in the home can be found at the following provincial resource:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/pesticides-pest-management/managing-pests/animals/bats>

Questions?