

## Rabies and Animal Exposures

With the hotter summer weather now upon us, people are engaging in outdoor activities, and patients may present to physicians with concerns about rabies risk following exposure to bats or other animals.

In British Columbia, bats are the only natural reservoir of rabies, and the prevalence of rabies among bats remains under 1%. A human case of rabies occurred last year, the 2<sup>nd</sup> case in BC in over 95 years, which highlighted the importance of timely assessment and intervention for cases of direct contact with bats.

### Scenarios you may encounter and recommended actions:

- **DIRECT CONTACT WITH A BAT**

If a patient reports direct contact (e.g. handling/touching/bites) with a bat in B.C. please call Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) Public Health. We will conduct a risk assessment to determine whether rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (RPEP) is indicated.

- **BAT IN A ROOM**

RPEP is not indicated if there is no history of direct contact. BC Public Health guidelines indicate that if a bat was found in the house or if someone woke up with a bat in the room (without any evidence of direct contact, such as bite marks), then RPEP is not indicated ([BCCDC, 2019](#)). A clear patient history of direct contact with a bat is important to elucidate. When a bat is found in the room of a child or someone whose history may be less reliable, assessment of direct contact can be difficult and consulting VCH Public Health is appropriate.

- **CONTACT WITH OTHER ANIMALS (NOT A BAT)**

In BC, terrestrial mammals are not known to be reservoirs of rabies. Therefore, rabies is extremely rare in domestic animals or wildlife other than bats in BC, and RPEP is not indicated for contact. Rabies risk is higher in animals recently imported from outside BC (in the last 6 months) or if the exposure occurred while travelling, including to other provinces or countries. Please call VCH Public Health for an assessment in these cases.

### Who to contact and clinical response:

If a patient presents with a history of contact with a bat in BC, or a bite from a bat or other mammal outside of BC, please call **VCH Public Health (Vancouver: 604-675-3900, Coastal: 604-983-6701, Richmond: 604-233-3150, After hours: 604-527-4893)** to assess the need for RPEP with vaccine and immunoglobulin. Authorization by a Medical Health Officer is required to release rabies vaccine and immunoglobulin, as well as to arrange follow up.

If you have discharged the patient, please provide the patient's contact information (i.e. name, phone number, alternate phone number, PHN, name of community of residence) so VCH Public Health. If the patient presents to care shortly after the exposure, manage the exposed site similar to other wounds. Wash the contact site with mild soap and copious amount of water for at least 15 minutes. Also consider updating tetanus-diphtheria vaccine as required.

You can reach a Medical Health Officer in Vancouver at 604.675.3900 Toll free at 1.855.675.3900  
For public health emergencies after hours contact the Medical Health Officer on call at 604.527.4893

Vancouver Medical Health Officers

Dr. Patricia Daly (Chief Medical Health Officer)

Vancouver: Dr. John Harding, Dr. Althea Hayden, Dr. Dr. Mark Lysyshyn, Dr. Michael Schwandt 604.675.3900

Richmond: Dr. Meena Dawar 604.233.3150

North Shore: Dr. Mark Lysyshyn 604.983.6701 | Coastal Rural: Dr. Geoff McKee 604.983.6701

To receive Physicians' Updates by email please contact us at: [VCHPhysiciansUpdate@vch.ca](mailto:VCHPhysiciansUpdate@vch.ca)

## Heat, Smoke and Health

This summer, communities in VCH can expect episodes of extreme hot weather and wildfire smoke. Everyone is at risk of heat and smoke related illness, but nearly one third of our community is at high risk due to age or comorbidities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the reprieve of air-conditioned and air-filtered public spaces may be limited for those who need it most. Therefore, extra care in preventing negative health effects of heat and smoke may be needed.

### Health Effects of Heat:

Heat causes a spectrum of illness from discomfort and thirst to heat stroke and death.

Those most vulnerable include young infants and young children, the elderly, people who are housebound in homes without air conditioning, those working or exercising in the heat, homeless individuals, and people with chronic heart and lung conditions, mental illness or substance use disorders. Certain drugs impair our bodies' ability to respond to heat, including diuretics, beta blockers, and the "anti's" such as: anti-hypertensives, anti-depressants, anti-psychotics, anti-cholinergics, anti-histamines, and anti-parkinsonian medications.

### Health Effects of Wildfire Smoke:

Wildfire smoke is a respiratory irritant with short and long-term health effects in everyone. Short term exposure to high levels of wildfire smoke can lead to acute exacerbations of respiratory or cardiac disease.

Those particularly vulnerable include infants and young children, the elderly, and those with diabetes, heart or lung disease. There is some evidence that long term exposure to wildfire smoke (weeks) during pregnancy may result in lower birth weights for infants.

### Recommendations for Patient Care:

The best way to prevent health impacts is to reduce exposure to heat and wildfire smoke. Advise patients to:

- Look for heat and air quality advisories, and reduce or postpone outdoor activity per the advice of advisories. When in the heat, wear lightweight, light-coloured, loose-fitting clothing and seek shade where possible.
- Stay hydrated *before* feeling hot, and pay attention to symptoms such as cramps, fatigue, dizziness or confusion in the heat, or cough/shortness of breath when air quality is poor. Limit activity and seek cool clean air.
- "Heat stroke" characterized by neurological symptoms is a medical emergency. Seek medical attention if experiencing symptoms such as confusion, fainting/altered level of consciousness or seizures.

Create summer management plans with your patients who belong to one or more of the vulnerable populations identified above. This should include strategies to reduce exposure to heat and smoke along with prescriptions for rescue medications. As well, advise family members to check on vulnerable patients, when advisories are in place.

Follow the links below for additional information and resources:

[www.vch.ca/heat](http://www.vch.ca/heat) for heat, and [www.vch.ca/wildfiresmoke](http://www.vch.ca/wildfiresmoke) for wildfire smoke

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