

# Australian Bat Lyssavirus in Metro South

## ABLV key facts

- Infection with Australian Bat Lyssavirus (ABLV) causes a rabies-like disease that is usually fatal.
- The virus was first identified in 1996 and three deaths have been recorded since this time, all in Queensland.

## How is it transmitted?

Any bat or flying fox in Australia could carry the virus.

Bats that appear healthy may be infectious.

The virus is transmitted to humans when infected bat saliva enters the body, usually via a bite or scratch but also by getting bat saliva in the eyes, nose or mouth or on a pre-existing skin break.

The time from exposure to when symptoms appear is highly variable, from weeks to years.

## What's the treatment?

Rabies vaccine given after the exposure but before the onset of any symptoms will prevent disease.

Once symptoms develop there is no specific treatment.

Proper cleaning of the wound reduces the risk of infection: wash with soap and water for at least 5 mins.

Tetanus injection may also be necessary.

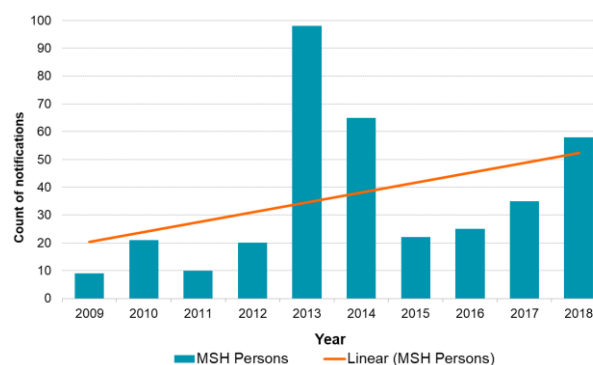
## What to do if exposed?

- Clean the wound carefully.
- Contact a GP or the nearest hospital immediately to commence post-exposure treatment.
- The GP or hospital will contact the local Public Health Unit to coordinate treatment.
- Contact the RSPCA hotline (1300 ANIMAL) or a wildlife carer to collect the bat for testing if it is available.

## Metro South Health data

An average of 40 potential ABVL exposures per year are reported to the Metro South Public Health Unit (just over 250 per year in the rest of Queensland).

Almost one quarter of these are in people aged 20–29 years.



A major peak in 2013 followed publicity relating to the third confirmed death in Queensland.

Growth in reported exposures in recent years reflects increased awareness of bat interactions among both the public and medical practitioners.

2019 will see a further increase with over 50 exposures reported in Metro South Health by the end of August.

Around half of all exposures are the result of intentional handling of a bat by members of the community with less than a quarter the result of the bat contacting the human.

## Main messages

- Reported exposures are increasing.
- **Don't touch bats — even if they are injured.**
- If exposed, **get vaccinated**, even if vaccinated previously.
- It's never too late — seek vaccination even if exposure was in the past.

For further information see: [metrosouth.health.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/health-indicators-2018-metro-south-health.pdf](https://metrosouth.health.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/health-indicators-2018-metro-south-health.pdf)

Queensland Health, Australian Bat Lyssavirus fact sheet: [conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthCondition/condition/14/217/10/australian-bat-lyssavirus](https://conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthCondition/condition/14/217/10/australian-bat-lyssavirus)