

Rabies and Australian bat lyssavirus

Rabies and Australian bat lyssavirus (ABLV) are very rare, closely related diseases that can cause very serious illness in humans.

Rabies is transmitted to humans primarily by infected dogs, however all mammals in rabies enzootic countries are susceptible.

ABLV is transmitted to humans by infected bats. Transmission occurs through direct contact of mucosa (eyes, nose, mouth) or broken skin with the saliva or tissues of an infected animal, most often through scratches or bites.

People who have been exposed to a potential source of infection are advised to seek urgent medical care, regardless of the severity of the injury, for wound care and assessment for post-exposure prophylaxis.

People might not always be aware if they have been exposed to rabies or ABLV. For example, even without being knowingly bitten or scratched by a bat, people may be exposed to ABLV by sleeping in an enclosed space (e.g., bedroom or tent) with a bat present.

Clinicians should refer to the [Australian Immunisation Handbook – Rabies and other lyssaviruses](#) for recommendations for pre-exposure and post-exposure prophylaxis. Post-exposure prophylaxis has two management algorithms based on the exposure:

- For exposures to a terrestrial animal in a rabies-enzootic country – see [Figure. Rabies post-exposure prophylaxis: terrestrial animal exposures](#)
- For exposures to a bat (in Australia or overseas) - see [Figure. Rabies post-exposure prophylaxis \(PEP\): bat exposures](#)

More information on how to order pre-exposure and post-exposure prophylaxis can be found on the [Victorian Department of Health – Ordering vaccines](#) webpage.

Barwon South West Public Health Unit (BSWPHU) can provide advice and support the provision of post-exposure prophylaxis. Contact BSWPHU on (03) 4215 3531 during business hours (08:30-17:00 Monday to Friday) or after-hours on 1300 651 160.

More disease related information can be found on the Victorian Department of Health webpages:

- [Rabies and Australian bat lyssavirus | health.vic.gov.au](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/rabies-and-australian-bat-lyssavirus)
- [Rabies | Better Health Channel](#)
- [Australian bat lyssavirus infection | Better Health Channel](#)
- [Ordering vaccines | health.vic.gov.au](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/vaccines/ordering-vaccines)