



- Please immediately bring to the attention of all doctors -

Date: 1 August 2007

Contact telephone number: **8226-7177 (24 hours/7 days)**

Health Risks associated with Flying Foxes in South-East.

Grey-headed Flying-foxes (*Pteropus poliocephalus*) (sometimes referred to as fruit bats) have been recently sighted or collected at a number of localities in the South East including Mt Gambier, Kongorong, Rendelsham and Woods Well on the Coorong. The reasons for their increased presence are unclear, but may be related to habitat destruction in other parts of the country.

CDCB has received reports of people who have been scratched or bitten by these animals while trying to remove them from fences or fruit tree netting. This is of concern because of the risk of transmission of Australian Bat Lyssavirus to those people.

A small proportion of flying foxes carry the Australian Bat Lyssavirus, a rabies-like virus which has been responsible for several deaths in Australia. Whilst the risk of contracting lyssavirus infection is low, the mortality rate approaches 100%. Anyone who presents with bat bites or scratches should be given prophylactic treatment with Rabies Immunoglobulin and Rabies Vaccine as outlined in the Australian Immunisation Handbook. In addition consider the need for tetanus prophylaxis, and the risk of bacterial wound infection.

The Department of Health funds this vaccine and immunoglobulin for post-exposure prophylaxis. Contact the Communicable Disease Control Branch for supply, which can be arranged at any time. Prophylaxis should be commenced as soon as possible after exposure, as the infection travels along nerves to the brain, and once the brain is involved the condition is almost invariably fatal.

CDCB recommends pre-exposure rabies vaccination for people who are at increased risk of lyssavirus infection, particularly bat-handlers and veterinarians. We also advise that the general public do not touch flying-foxes and other bats under any circumstances.

Please contact the Communicable Disease Control Branch on 08 8226 7177 (24hours/7 days) for any enquiries or advice.

Dr Ann Koehler - Director, Communicable Disease Control Branch

Information contained within this advice should be treated as confidential and is for the intended recipient only.

PUBLIC HEALTH ALERT