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Leave bat rescue to the experts

NSW Health is urging the public to be careful with bats. Dr Bradley Forssman, Director of Public Health, Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District advises that with the start of the breeding season and of hot weather people may come across injured, sick or distressed bats.

Dr Forssman said that lyssavirus, a very close relative of the rabies virus, is carried by all 4 species of Australian fruit bats (flying foxes) and at least 3 species of insectivorous bat. “Everyone should assume that all bats and flying foxes are infectious, regardless of whether the animal looks sick or not”, he said. We have recently had a bat in the Penrith area that tested positive to lyssavirus and there are others in NSW that also tested positive.

“If a person becomes infected with this virus and does not receive prompt treatment, they will almost certainly die from their infection. Clearly, avoiding this risk by not handling bats is a much better strategy than taking the chance of contracting a very distressing and ultimately fatal disease or going through a lengthy course of vaccinations.”

Research has shown that people often handle bats because they are concerned about the welfare of the bats and do not consider their own welfare. However people who are inexperienced in handling bats may cause more harm or distress to the bats. It is better to call WIRES on 1300 094 737 to get one of their expert handlers who have been vaccinated for rabies/ lyssavirus to collect the bat.

However, if you do get scratched or bitten by a bat, please seek attention from your General Practitioner for the wound and contact your local Public Health Unit on 1300 066 055.

For more information about bats and health see:

<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/environment/factsheets/Pages/flying-foxes.aspx>

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