Safety Notification - Number 14-02

Safety Alert:

Bat virus alert – Do not handle

The NSW Department of Health has urged people not to approach injured bats and flying foxes following three confirmed cases of the potentially fatal lyssavirus in NSW bats this year. Three human cases of lyssavirus have occurred in Australia, all in QLD, and all three people died.

Director of the Communicable Diseases Branch has reported that NSW Health was concerned that the bat birthing season in October and November would see young and miscarried pups on the ground. People are urged to avoid injured animals and assume that all bats and flying foxes are infectious, regardless of whether the animal looks ill or not. Should exposure occur it is imperative to seek urgent medical attention so that preventative treatment can be commenced.

The Director has stated that "The best protection against being exposed to the deadly lyssavirus is to avoid handling any bat in Australia, and any wild or domestic mammal in a rabies-endemic country, which includes bats and wild or domestic dogs, cats, and monkeys."

People can contact the experts at WIRES (NSW Wildlife Information, Rescue and Education Service) on 1300 094 737 if they find a bat or other animal that is injured or in distress. For your Local Public Health Unit, phone 1300 066 055.

Staff and students who are intending to travel overseas should ensure that they consult with the University Health Service or their own GP regarding health risks such as lyssavirus or rabies in the destination country, and vaccination requirements, prior to travel. For University Staff traveling on University business, the Travel Medical Review and any associated vaccination costs are free of charge to the Staff member. Call UON Health Service on 4921 6000 to make an appointment.

Queries relating to Health and Safety review and approval procedures for Overseas Travel on University business can be directed to Senior Safety Officer Dylan Mitchell ph: 4921 2053 or email: Local-Safety-Review@newcastle.edu.au .

Info source: PS (Public Service) News Edition # 390 available via http://www.psnews.com.au/nsw