



Northern Health Physicians Partners in Wellness

Public Health Newsletter for Northern Health Physicians

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BULLETIN

Rabies and Animal Exposures

Chiefs of Staff, COOs and HSAs are requested to bring this to the attention of Northern Health's General Practitioners.

A fatal case of rabies in BC has been confirmed. This is a rare and tragic event that followed direct contact with a bat. Despite many human interactions with bats, only two cases of rabies have occurred in BC since 1924. This case has increased public awareness of the risk of rabies, and many individuals are now seeking care for animal exposures. In humans, rabies infection is nearly always fatal. When started promptly, post-exposure prophylaxis with rabies immunoglobulin and vaccine is nearly 100% effective at preventing disease.

My patient was bitten or scratched by an animal – now what?

- 1. Irrigate and treat wound***
- 2. Provide tetanus booster if needed***
- 3. Assess the risk of rabies, if you believe the rabies risk is significant, or are uncertain, contact the MHO on call.***

The MHO Can:

- Assess the risk for rabies from the exposure**
- Discuss the need for rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (RPEP).**
Note that MHO approval is needed to release RPEP in BC.
- Advise on the use of Rabies Immunoglobulin**
- Arrange proper follow up for the client**

Assessing the risk:

Species and geography:

In BC, bats are the only animal that carry rabies. Less than 1% of bats in BC carry rabies, however 13% of bats submitted for testing after human contact were found to be infected. However in other provinces and other countries, various mammals have been reported to carry rabies including dogs, cats, and raccoons.

Type of Contact & Rabies Transmission

Humans can contract rabies from percutaneous or mucous membrane exposures to the saliva or neural tissue/fluid of an infected animal. Typically, this occurs through scratches or bites. However, some wounds are so small that percutaneous exposure can occur without a visible wound. For this reason, we treat all direct contact with a bat as a high-risk exposure.

Assessment of the Animal

If exposure to a bat occurs and it is available for testing, this can be arranged by public health. Testing of other animals is rarely required in BC. However, veterinary assessment of animals, or monitoring for symptoms in domestic pets, can sometimes enable patients to avoid unnecessary prophylaxis.

General Advice

To prevent exposure, we advise that people avoid contact with bats, dead or alive. Never touch a bat with bare hands. Travelers, especially in developing countries, should avoid contact with all mammals.

If a patient presents with a history of contact with a bat in BC, or a bite from another mammal outside of BC, please the Northern Health CD HUB at 250-565-2990 to assess the need for vaccination (after hours and weekends 250-565-2000).

For further details on how rabies risk is assessed by public health professionals, RPEP schedules and dosing, and other background information: <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-professionals/clinical-resources/communicable-disease-control-manual>

The guidance provided to BC veterinarians can be found here: http://www.bccdc.ca/Documents/BC%20Rabies%20Guidance%20for%20Veterinarians_Nov%202017.pdf

The guidelines for tetanus prophylaxis in wound management can be found at: <http://www.bccdc.ca/resource-gallery/Documents/Guidelines%20and%20Forms/Guidelines%20and%20Manuals/Epid/CD%20Manual/Chapter%20-%20Imms/Part4/TetanusProphylaxis.pdf>

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