Bat Awareness and Public Health

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Lots of population health work going on:

• Strong healthy communities partnerships with municipalities, including Squamish
• Planning 3\textsuperscript{rd} annual Sea to Sky Congress for 2020
• My Health My Community Round 2 starting in early 2020
• Etc.

However....
Why are we talking about this?

- Recent death from rabies following bat exposure in BC
- Highly effective preventive treatment available
- Public health responsible for following up on high risk human bat exposures
- Most bat exposures occur in rural areas of VCH
Bats in BC

• There are at least **16** species of bats living in BC, **11** of which can be found in the lower mainland

• Bats are essential members of local ecosystems

• Conservation concern:
  • Habitats at risk
  • White-nose syndrome
Most reports of bat exposures in BC occur in spring and summer.

- Bats hibernate or migrate in the winter.
- People spend less time outdoors in the fall and winter.*

*Perhaps not the case in Whistler!
What is Rabies?

- Rabies is caused by a virus
- Transmitted through saliva
- Infects the brain and nervous system

If not treated in time, rabies infection is almost always fatal

http://www.scientificanimations.com/wiki-images/
Bats and Rabies

• Bats are the ONLY reservoir of rabies in British Columbia
• In 2018, 7.6% of bat specimens submitted to the animal testing lab tested positive for rabies in BC

Estimated that only 0.5% of bats in BC carry rabies

Rabies transmission

- Rabies can be transmitted through bites, scratches, or mucous membrane exposure to bat saliva
- Requires a **direct exposure** to a bat
Risk of Rabies in BC

• While there are an estimated 59,000\(^1\) human deaths from rabies globally each year, only 3 human cases of rabies have been reported in BC since 1924\(^2\)

Nonetheless – the disease is **severe** and we have a **highly effective preventive treatment**

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\(^1\)https://www.who.int/rabies/epidemiology/en/
What to do if you have a direct exposure?

• Immediately **wash** the wound well with soap and water for 10 min.
• Seek urgent **medical attention** from your doctor or local public health unit
What to do with the bat?

- If the bat is dead:
  - Environmental Health Officers* can submit for testing
- If the bat is alive:
  - Don’t try to capture if you have not had previous contact with the bat
  - Call local pest control

*Contact local public health unit (Squamish - 604-892-2293)
What is Rabies Post-Exposure Prophylaxis?

• Wounds or clear site of exposure:
  • Rabies immunoglobulin (blood product)

• Vaccine series
  • Three doses of rabies vaccine on day 0, 3, 7*

*Schedule may depend on immune status and differ in other provinces or countries
Other notes

• If pet exposed and no direct contact with human - contact veterinarian for assessment

• More information on managing bat pests in the home can be found at the following provincial resource:

  https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/pesticides-pest-management/managing-pests/animals/bats
Questions?