

Rabies and Animal Exposures

With warmer weather and increased outdoor activity, physicians may see a greater volume of patients with concerns about rabies following exposure to bats or other animals.

In British Columbia, bats are the only natural reservoir of rabies, and the prevalence of rabies among bats remains under 1%. Bats are also a reservoir for rabies in other provinces and countries. Timely assessment and intervention for cases of direct contact with bats is warranted. The public is advised to avoid contact with bats or trying to capture bats. Contact with other wildlife or domestic animals in BC, including dogs, cats, and racoons, does **not** pose a risk and does **not** require post-exposure prophylaxis.

Scenarios you may encounter and recommended actions:

Scenario	Description	Recommended Action
Direct contact with a bat	Patient reports direct contact with a bat, either in BC or another province or country (e.g. handling, touching, bites)	Please consult VCH Public Health to determine if RPEP is indicated
Bat in a room	Bat found in the house, or someone wakes up with a bat in the room without any evidence of direct contact (e.g. bite marks)	RPEP is not indicated (BCCDC, 2023)
	Bat found in the room of a child or someone whose history is less reliable and assessment of direct contact is difficult	Consult VCH Public Health
Contact with other animals (not a bat)	Contact with domestic animals or wildlife (other than bats) in BC	RPEP not indicated for contact
	Contact with animal known to be imported from outside BC in the last 6 months	Consult VCH Public Health for an assessment
	Contact with an animal while travelling to other provinces or countries with different animal reservoirs for rabies	

Who to contact and clinical response:

If a patient presents with a history of contact with a bat in BC or outside BC, or a bite from a mammal outside of BC, please call **VCH Public Health (Vancouver: 604-675-3900, Coastal: your local public health unit or 604-983-6701, Richmond: 604-233-3150, VCH after hours: 604-527-4893)** to assess the need for RPEP with vaccine and immunoglobulin. Authorization by a Medical Health Officer is required to release rabies vaccine and immunoglobulin, and they can coordinate the required follow up. RPEP is available at public health, and most UPCC or emergency department locations.

If you have discharged the patient, please provide the patient's contact information (i.e. name, phone number, alternate phone number, PHN, name of community of residence) to VCH Public Health. If the patient presents to care shortly after the exposure, manage the exposed site similar to other wounds. Wash the contact site with mild soap and copious amount of water for at least 15 minutes. Also consider updating tetanus-diphtheria vaccine as required.

Additional information can be located at the links below:

- For members of the public: www.vch.ca/rabies
- For health professionals: www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/rabies

You can reach a Medical Health Officer at 604.675.3900 | Toll free at 1.855.675.3900
For public health emergencies after hours, contact the Medical Health Officer on call at 604.527.4893

Vancouver Coastal Health Medical Health Officers

Chief Medical Health Officer: Dr. Patricia Daly

Vancouver: Dr. Althea Hayden, Dr. Mark Lysyshyn, Dr. Michael Schwandt 604.675.3900

Richmond: Dr. Meena Dawar 604.233.3150 | North Shore: Dr. Alex Choi 604.983.6700 | Coastal Rural: Dr. Moliehi Khaketla 604.984.5070

To receive these updates by email, please contact us at VCHPhysiciansUpdate@vch.ca

Heat, Smoke and Health

This summer, communities in VCH can expect episodes of extreme hot weather and wildfire smoke. Everyone is at risk of heat and smoke related illness, but nearly one third of our community is at high risk due to age or comorbidities.

Health Effects of Heat:

Heat causes a spectrum of illness, from discomfort and thirst to heat stroke and death.

Those most vulnerable include infants and young children, pregnant individuals, the elderly, people who are bedbound or socially isolated in homes without air conditioning, those working or exercising in the heat, homeless individuals, people with disabilities, and people with chronic heart and lung conditions, mental illness or substance use disorders. Certain drugs impair our bodies' ability to respond to heat, including diuretics, beta blockers, and the "anti's" such as: anti-hypertensives, antidepressants, anti-psychotics, anti-cholinergics, antihistamines, and anti-parkinsonian medications.

Health Effects of Wildfire Smoke:

Wildfire smoke is a respiratory irritant with short and long term health effects in everyone. Short term exposure to high levels of wildfire smoke can lead to acute exacerbations of respiratory or cardiac disease.

Those particularly vulnerable include infants and young children, pregnant individuals, the elderly, those with diabetes, heart or lung disease, and individuals with disabilities. There is some evidence that long term exposure (weeks) to wildfire smoke during pregnancy may result in lower birth weights for infants.

Recommendations for Patient Care:

The best way to prevent health impacts is to reduce exposure to heat and wildfire smoke. Advise patients to:

- Look for heat and air quality advisories, and reduce or postpone outdoor activity per the advice of advisories. When in the heat, wear lightweight, light-coloured, loose-fitting clothing and seek shade where possible.
- Plan for a space with cool and clean air when needed, either in the patient's home or other sites such as civic centres, libraries, homes of family/friends, etc.
- While a properly worn N95 mask can reduce inhaled particulate matter, this measure is secondary in impact and importance to the key advice that people should access a space with clean air. Surgical masks provide significantly less protection than N95 masks, and single-layer cloth masks, scarves, bandanas, etc. provide no protection.
- Stay hydrated before feeling hot, and pay attention to symptoms such as cramps, fatigue, dizziness or confusion in the heat, or cough/shortness of breath when air quality is poor. Limit activity and seek cool clean air.
- "Heat stroke", characterized by neurological symptoms, is a medical emergency. Seek medical attention if experiencing symptoms such as confusion, fainting/altered level of consciousness, or seizures.

Create summer management plans with your patients who belong to one or more of the vulnerable populations identified above. This should include strategies to reduce exposure to heat and smoke, along with prescriptions for rescue medications. As well, advise family members to check on vulnerable patients when advisories are in place.

Follow the links below for additional information and resources:

www.vch.ca/heat for heat, and www.vch.ca/wildfiresmoke for wildfire smoke.

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