

GUIDELINES FOR PASSIVE DISEASE SURVEILLANCE OF SOUTHERN BENT-WING BATS

Why is disease surveillance in southern bent-wing bats important?

Southern bent-wing bats are critically endangered, with population numbers having declined sharply over the last few decades. We are concerned about disease as a potential contributor to future population declines, including, **but not limited to**, the devastating fungal disease [White Nose Syndrome](#) (see also [Wildlife Health Australia Fact Sheet](#)), which is currently thought to be exotic to Australia.

What should I be looking for?

Bats are host to a number of zoonotic diseases, including the fatal Australian Bat Lyssavirus. **It is therefore important that you do NOT handle bats unless you are experienced in handling bats, have a current vaccination against rabies AND use appropriate personal protective equipment.**

Please look out for southern bent-wing bats (or any other bats) with the following features:

- groups of dead bats (three or more dead bats found in close physical proximity to each other)
- ongoing bat deaths (three or more bats found dead within days of each other)
- abnormal behaviour, e.g. found on ground, flying during the day
- skin lesions, (e.g. fungal growth, hyperkeratosis/scabs, lumps, ulceration) or wing damage (membrane thinning, depigmentation, flakiness, non-traumatic holes)

What should I do if a bat with any of those signs is presented to me?

Please contact:

- Your local [State/Territory Wildlife Health Australia \(WHA\) Coordinator](#)
- The 24 h [Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline](#) on Freecall 1800 675 888
- [Wildlife Health Australia](#) (Phone: 02 9960 6333 (business hours only))

Please record and report:

- Exact location where the bat(s) was found
- Other details if known (number of bats affected, species, unusual behaviour)
- Photographs of bat and lesions
- Description of the lesions

You will be advised about submission of samples; this will vary between states. The [WHA National Guidelines for Sample Submission – White-nose Syndrome Exclusion Testing](#) have more information.

How can I prevent spread of disease to other bats, humans or animals?

Any live bats with suspect White Nose Syndrome should be kept isolated from other animals to reduce the risk of transmission of disease. Use appropriate personal protective equipment to prevent the potential spread of White Nose Syndrome to other bats and the environment, and to protect against zoonotic diseases such as ABLV. Clothing and equipment in contact with the bat should be decontaminated according to the established [WNS Decontamination Protocol](#).

Your Wildlife Health Australia coordinator or the Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline will also be able to provide you with guidance on biosecurity.

For more information on White Nose Syndrome, including biosecurity and decontamination, go to the [WHA website](#).

Examples of lesions:



Bat with fungal growths (White Nose Syndrome in this example) on wings and head (Image: Patuxent Wildlife Research Centre)



Bat with hyperkeratotic nodules on wings (caused by infection with *Notoedres muris* in this example) (Image: Holz et al. 2019)