Working Safely with Bats and Flying Foxes Procedure

Section 1 - Purpose and Scope

(1) This Procedure outlines the requirements at The University of Queensland (UQ) for conducting work with bats or flying foxes and applies to all UQ workers across all UQ campuses and sites. For the purposes of this Procedure, the definition of UQ workers is broad – including staff, students, visitors, volunteers and contractors – and is intended to ensure UQ meets its responsibilities under the Work Health and Safety Act 2011. The definition of UQ workers is provided in the appendix in section 7.

(2) Bats and flying foxes have the potential to carry and transmit infectious diseases including Australian Bat Lyssavirus (ABL), a form of rabies, and Hendra Virus (HeV). The purpose of this Procedure is to minimise the risk of human exposure to ABL or HeV by ensuring UQ workers working with bats and flying foxes:

a. comply with UQ health and safety, Institutional Biosafety Committee and Animal Ethics Committee requirements;
b. follow appropriate risk management procedures; and
c. are properly trained and competent to work with bats or flying foxes and are aware of the occupational health recommendations regarding pre-exposure vaccination and post-exposure treatments.

Context

(3) UQ is obliged under the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 to ensure that the health and safety of people is not at risk from work carried out as part of the conduct of a UQ business or undertaking.

(4) The Queensland Government has published the following guidance material on a range of animal diseases and disorders, including:

a. Australian Bat Lyssavirus and handling bats
b. Australian Bat Lyssavirus
c. Hendra Virus
d. Safe bat handling.

(5) The Australian Veterinary Association provides guidelines and information to help veterinarians with the management of ABL in bats or pets, including treatment options and the use of the rabies vaccine.

(6) Current ABL and HeV management practices for the Gatton Campus are detailed in The University of Queensland Gatton Campus Biosecurity Management Plan.

Section 2 - Process and Key Controls

(7) Before conducting any work with bats or flying foxes, UQ workers must:

a. submit a High-Risk Biological Material application for approval through UQSafe for lab activity;
b. submit a risk assessment on the proposed work on bats or flying foxes through UQSafe; and
c. receive a pre-exposure vaccination if the worker will be exposed to bats or flying foxes, at risk of being bitten or scratched by a bat or flying fox or will be working with ABL in a laboratory.

(8) Organisational Units must establish a post-exposure protocol prior to commencing any work with bats or flying foxes including specific information about the types of bats and flying foxes being worked with, vaccination requirements for workers and details of the nearest public health or medical practitioner to contact in the event of exposure.

(9) UQ workers that suspect a bat or flying fox is infected with ABL or HeV must notify their direct supervisor and the Director, Health, Safety and Wellness as soon as practicable. The Director, Health, Safety and Wellness will notify Biosecurity Queensland and, if required, the Public Health Branch of Queensland Health.

Section 3 - Key Requirements

High Risk Biological Material Application

(10) UQ's Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC) requires Chief Investigators or Project Supervisors to submit a High Risk Biological Material application prior to commencing any work with bats or flying foxes. Any application to the IBC must be approved prior to commencing any work on flying foxes. Forms must be completed and submitted in UQSafe (Lab Activity Application Register).

Risk Assessment

(11) All work with bats or flying foxes must be assessed for risks associated with the work prior to its commencement. Chief Investigators or Project Supervisors are responsible for completing risk assessments in UQSafe. The risk assessment should include consideration of potential exposure to ABL or HeV, particularly if the bats or flying foxes are sick or injured.

(12) Further information about conducting risk assessments at UQ is provided in the Health and Safety Risk Management Procedure.

Pre-exposure Vaccination

(13) A pre-exposure vaccination is required for UQ workers that may be occupationally exposed to bats or flying foxes and where there is a risk of being bitten or scratched by bats or flying foxes. ABL is classified Risk Group 3 and requires special consideration including health surveillance. UQ workers must consult the UQ Biosafety Advisors prior to undertaking any work involving ABL.

(14) UQ workers requiring a pre-exposure vaccination include:

a. workers (including students) who have contact with bats for research purposes;
b. workers (including students on placement) who have contact with bats for clinical purposes (e.g. veterinarians, veterinary assistants, wildlife carers etc);
c. workers (including students) who travel to rabies-enzootic regions, based on risk assessment, who may come into contact with bats; and
d. laboratory workers (including students) who work with live lyssavirus.

(15) The Australian Immunisation Handbook recommends the following:

a. Pre-exposure vaccination consists of three doses of rabies vaccine given on days 0, 7 and 21-28.
b. Workers with ongoing exposure to live lyssaviruses should have rabies virus neutralising antibody titres measured every six months. If the titre is inadequate (<0.5 IU per ml), they should have a booster dose. Alternatively, a booster dose can be given every two years without determining the antibody level.
c. Workers with exposure to bats should have a single intramuscular booster dose 1 year after their 1st dose of rabies vaccine pre-exposure prophylaxis. These workers should have Virus neutralizing antibody (VNAb) titres measured every 3 years after that. If their VNAb titre is <0.5 IU per mL, they should have a further single intramuscular booster dose. Alternatively, after the 1st booster dose, they can have a further single intramuscular booster dose every 3 years without determining the VNAb titre.

Post-exposure Protocol

(16) Prior to commencing any work with bats or flying foxes, Organisational Units must establish a post exposure protocol that includes specific information relating to the type of bats/flying foxes being worked with, vaccination requirements for workers and details of nearest public health or medical practitioner to contact in the event of an exposure. The protocol should also include the following:

a. first aid steps and instructions;
b. direction to consult with a medical practitioner or to contact the relevant public health unit as soon as possible after an injury when working with a bat or flying fox;
c. direction to seek advice from the relevant public health unit in relation to collecting the bat or flying fox for testing and (including how the bat or flying fox should be transported and tested); and
d. reporting requirements once medical treatment has been sought (i.e. reporting the incident to the supervisor and in UQSafe as soon as practical).

Section 4 - Roles, Responsibilities and Accountabilities

Heads of Organisational Units

(17) Heads of Organisational Units that conduct work with bats or flying foxes are responsible for implementing this Procedure within the unit, including ensuring all associated local standard operating procedures are available to workers and reviewed regularly to reflect current requirements.

Chief Investigators

(18) Chief Investigators are responsible for the ongoing monitoring, management and oversight of work with bats and flying foxes, and must ensure:

a. work is conducted in appropriate facilities or locations in compliance with IBC approvals;
b. an IBC approval is in place prior to commencing work;
c. periodic audits of the vaccination status workers in the Organisational Unit are conducted;
d. records are maintained in accordance with IBC approval requirements; and
e. UQ workers that handle bats or flying foxes:
    i. are competent and trained in accordance with UQ IBC requirements;
    ii. are vaccinated; and
    iii. comply with all conditions of approval from the IBC.

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UQ Workers

(19) UQ workers that work with bats or flying foxes at UQ must comply with this Procedure, including but not limited to:

a. undertaking any relevant training as determined by training needs analysis or supervisor direction, before commencing any work with bats or flying foxes;
b. meeting the vaccination requirements outlined in this Procedure prior to commencing any work with bats or flying foxes;
c. any regulatory or IBC requirements included in approval to work with bats or flying foxes; and
d. local procedures and requirements of organisations and locations external to UQ.

Health, Safety and Wellness Division

(20) The Health, Safety and Wellness Division is responsible for:

a. providing UQ workers with education, advice and information about occupational health and safety compliance obligations at UQ; and
b. assessing whether Organisational Units and UQ workers are able to demonstrate compliance with this Procedure and that any compliance issues that are identified are rectified in a timely manner.

(21) The Biosafety Team (Biosafety Advisors) within the Health, Safety and Wellness Division are responsible for:

a. advising workers about specific biosafety matters affecting UQ, including workplace safety obligations and regulatory compliance;
b. reporting to or advising UQ's Institutional Biosafety Committee on biosafety matters as required; and
c. liaising with the Australian Government biosecurity regulator with respect to UQ's biosecurity compliance obligations (including hosting regulator site visits or inspections).

(22) The Occupational Health Consultants within the Health, Safety and Wellness Division are responsible for:

a. verifying immunisation records submitted by the UQ worker; and
b. in the event of an exposure, ensuring post exposure protocol is carried out as directed by a medical practitioner and Queensland Health.

Section 5 - Monitoring, Review and Assurance

Compliance

(23) Heads of Organisational Units are responsible for monitoring workers' compliance with vaccination requirements and report ongoing non-compliance to the Biosafety Team in the Health, Safety and Wellness Division (email: biosafety@uq.edu.au).

(24) The Biosafety Team will provide ongoing monitoring and review of UQ's biosafety systems and controls on behalf of the Institutional Biosafety Committee, including annual audits and inspections of facilities conducting work on bats and flying foxes. The Biosafety Team and the Occupational Health Nurse Advisor will review this Procedure as required to ensure it remains relevant and current.

Non-compliance

(25) UQ workers that do not comply with this Procedure will be subject to corrective actions from the Institutional

Biosafety Committee and/or the Health, Safety and Wellness Division, and suspension of work if conditions are not met.

(26) UQ may be subject to corrective actions or notices issued by Australian or Queensland government authorities to suspend work that does not comply with regulatory requirements.

Section 6 - Recording and Reporting

(27) Evidence of rabies vaccination or serological testing is to be submitted by the UQ worker to the UQ centralised immunisation record system. The record will be verified and stored by UQ for the prescribed legislative period and may be subject to inspection and review from time to time by regulators and UQ representatives. Further information is contained in UQ's Vaccinations and Immunisation Procedure.

(28) The Director, Health, Safety and Wellness is responsible for reporting any matters required by the Biosecurity Act 2014 or Public Health Act 2005 to Biosecurity Queensland or Queensland Health as appropriate.

Section 7 - Appendix

Definitions

Term	Definition
Australia Bat Lyssavirus (ABL)	A viral disease of the same class as rabies virus carried by all species of large bats (fruit bats/flying foxes) and some micro-bats.
Hendra Virus (HeV)	A viral disease carried by flying foxes or bats that may infect horses, which in turn may transmit to humans.
UQ workers	For the purposes of this Procedure includes: • staff – continuing, fixed-term, research (contingent funded) and casual staff; • contractors, subcontractors and consultants; • visiting academics and researchers; • affiliates – academic title holders, visiting academics, emeritus professors, adjunct and honorary title holders, industry fellows and conjoint appointments; • higher degree by research students; and • volunteers and students undertaking work experience.

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