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Bat Lyssavirus (Bat Rabies) confirmed in a cat in Italy

A cat in Tuscany has been diagnosed with rabies caused by a bat virus

A cat in Arezzo, a town in Tuscany, Italy has been diagnosed with rabies caused by a bat virus similar to rabies (West Caucasian Bat Lyssavirus). The cat was diagnosed on 27 June 2020 by the National Reference Centre for Rabies in Italy [1]. The infected cat, which had neurological symptoms and eventually died, lived near a bat colony [2].

West Caucasian Bat Lyssavirus (WCBV) has only previously been detected in European bats in the western Caucasus mountains of southeastern Europe in 2002. To date, there have been no reported WCBV infections in humans [1, 2].

Public health officials in Italy are following up this incident [1]. Individuals who had contact with the infected cat have received post-exposure prophylaxis [2]. The source of infection and possible spread to other animals in the area is also being investigated [1, 2].

Advice for travellers

If you have been bitten, scratched or licked by any animal (domestic animal, wild animal or bat) in the town of Arezzo, Italy from May 2020, you are advised to seek medical attention locally. On return to the UK, you should then contact a health professional so that a risk assessment can be carried out [1].

Rabies is a viral disease, which can be transmitted to humans by contact with saliva from a rabies-infected wild or domestic animal, including pets, via a bite, scratch or a lick to an open wound. Bats also carry a form of rabies, so all bat bites and scratches should be considered a potential risk for rabies.

Rabies is usually fatal, once symptoms develop, but the disease is preventable if the correct post-exposure treatment (PET) is provided quickly. If you may have been exposed to this animal, you should seek prompt advice from your GP surgery or Accident and Emergency.

Advice for health professionals

All travellers to [countries where rabies is known or presumed to occur](#) should be advised of the importance of first aid and of seeking urgent reputable medical attention if they are bitten, scratched or licked by any mammal. This advice is important for all travellers, whether or not pre-exposure vaccine was given.

Expert advice and guidance on assessing risk following rabies exposure including post-exposure treatment and public health management of a suspected rabies case is available from:

England: [Public Health England \(PHE\) Rabies and Immunoglobulin Service](#) on 0330 128 1020, or 0208 200 4400 (PHE Colindale Duty Doctor out of hours).

Northern Ireland: the Public Health Agency Duty Room on 030 0555 0119

Wales: the Duty Virologist at University Hospital of Wales, Cardiff on 029 20 742 094 or 029 20 747 747 or from the Public Health Wales health protection team on 0300 003 0032.

Scotland: [Public Health Scotland](#). Health professionals should contact their local infectious disease unit.

Resources

- [Rabies factsheet](#)
- [Public Health England: Rabies risk assessment, post exposure treatment, management](#)
- [Public Health England: Rabies leaflet for travellers](#)

References

1. [Public Health England. Rabies confirmed in a cat in Italy. Last updated 7 July 2020. \[Accessed 10 July 2020\]](#)
2. [European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. Lyssavirus - Italy - 2020. Communicable Diseases Threat Report. 28 June - 4 July 2020 \[Accessed 10 July 2020\]](#)