

Western Bat Working Group
Position Statement on Rabies Protection

Position Statement Background

The need for this position statement was founded on 1) occasional reported incidents in western North America, of individuals handling bats without the protection of pre-exposure rabies vaccinations, and 2) that the consequence of an individual being bitten by a bat and contracting rabies while working on a bat project would be fatal to the individual, and could result in reactionary restrictions by State and Federal government and institutions that could negatively effect bat studies across western North America. The intent of the position statement is to provide support to agencies and organizations to secure pre-exposure rabies vaccinations for individuals working with bats.

The position statement was drafted in Spring of 2006 and reviewed and edited upon request by Paul Cryan and Tom O'Shea. It was then sent out to the State and Provincial Representatives for review and input in May, 2006. Additionally, the CDC's website, and the National Committee on Rabies Prevention Report (The reference used by the CDC) were referenced, and a medical practitioner who specializes in vaccinations, especially rabies prophylaxis was consulted. All input from the States and Provinces was considered and incorporated when it did not conflict with the above references. Additionally, Barbara French of BCI provided feedback so that the position statement was consistent with the North American Symposium on Bat Research position on rabies. The Position statement was voted on and passed by the WBWG Board on the October 30, 2006 conference call. 12 States and provinces were represented on the call and the vote was 10 affirmative and 2 opposed.

**WBWG Position Statement on Rabies Protection
adopted 10/30/2006**

Individuals who work with bats are at greater risk of rabies exposure than the general public. Although avoiding being bitten by bats is the most effective means to preclude exposure to the rabies virus, relying on bite prevention alone is inadequate protection for practitioners who work with bats. Additionally, bites that barely penetrate the skin can still effectively transmit the rabies virus yet may be dismissed as inconsequential.

Pre-exposure rabies vaccinations and maintaining an adequate titer to protect against the rabies virus are essential procedures for ensuring that wildlife practitioners do not contract rabies. The success of pre-exposure rabies vaccinations and maintenance of a protective titer in protecting individuals exposed to the rabies virus from contracting the disease is considered high by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Conversely, the consequences of excluding pre-exposure shots and titer maintenance as basic preventive measures for projects that expose practitioners to the rabies virus can be costly and risky. Relying solely on post-exposure shots when potential rabies exposure is known to occur can cost four or five times as much as pre-exposure prophylactics. More critically, a bite from a bat infected with rabies that goes untreated will be fatal to an

exposed practitioner who lacks pre-exposure vaccinations and a protective titer. The WBWG feels that the latter consequence of neglecting to secure pre-exposure rabies vaccinations and maintaining a current titer is an unacceptable risk.

It is the position of The Western Bat Working Group (WBWG) that acquiring pre-exposure rabies vaccinations and maintaining an adequate titer to protect against rabies are basic safety measures applicable to all individuals who expect to come into contact with bats when working on biological projects.