



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Health Department

Dear Colleague

BATS AND HUMAN HEALTH

Last year a man died of rabies in Tayside. He was known to have had close contact with bats over many years and it is probable that his infection was acquired as a result of being bitten by an infected bat. This tragic incident has raised the profile of the disease and increased public concern in relation to bats.

We are now approaching the end of the bat population's winter hibernation period with the likelihood of human contact with bats increasing in the coming months.

The purpose of this letter is as a reminder, to general practitioners in particular, of the imminent emergence of the bat population and the possibility of patients seeking advice or treatment. There has been no change in the guidance issued towards the end of last year in SEHD/CMO (2002) 11.

All available evidence indicates that the threat from bats to the general public, or to pets and domestic animals, is extremely low. Bats are naturally timid and members of the public should avoid direct contact with them.

However, those engaged in bat conservation activities who routinely handle bats are at risk. This should be reduced by wearing protective clothing and, if not already immunised, obtaining pre-exposure (prophylactic) immunisation with rabies vaccine.

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and SCIEH have drafted a leaflet *Bats and Human Health* which provides basic information and also advice on appropriate action if bats enter homes. **This was published in May 2003 and is available on the SHOW website at:**

http://www.show.scot.nhs.uk/scieh/documents/bats_human_health_SNH_SCIEH.pdf

Yours sincerely

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From the Chief Medical Officer

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14 April 2003

SEHD/CMO(2003)5

For action

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For information

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