Flying-foxes on Berry Farms

What you can and can't do | Grower fact sheet | NSW

A starvation event is under way. Flying-foxes are feeding heavily on berry crops. Expect weak bats feeding in daylight, bats on the ground, and more bats caught in netting or found dead.
Three rules: (1) Flying-foxes are protected, so netting is the only legal way to protect a crop**. (2) Nobody on the farm touches a live bat and dead bats only as directed** (3) Any bite or scratch is a medical emergency.

WH&S: keeping workers safe

Under the WHS Act 2011, growers must manage the risk of bat contact like any other workplace hazard. Any flying-fox can carry Australian bat lyssavirus, which is fatal once symptoms appear.

- **Induct everyone,** including pickers, netting crews and contractors: no touching bats, report every bat found, and know the first-aid steps below.
- **Grounded or weak bats:** keep people and dogs at least 2 m away and call **WIRES on 1300 094 737 (24/7)**. A weak bat can still bite.
- **Bats in netting:** don't cut or untangle them. Call WIRES, and leave the net in place until the rescuer arrives.
- **Dead bats:** With permission from your supervisor wear thick gloves and use a shovel. Double-bag the carcass, then bin it or bury it at least 15 cm deep, and wash your hands afterwards. If you find a lot of dead bats, call WIRES for advice. Don't read or remove leg bands; tell a carer. Be aware that dead bats can have live pups on them who can be rescued.
- **PPE:** gloves and long sleeves for netting work. Add a P2/N95 mask and eye protection when cleaning dried droppings.
- **Horses on the property:** vaccinate them against Hendra virus, and keep their feed and water covered and away from the crop.

If someone is bitten or scratched

Treat every bite or scratch as urgent, however minor. Vaccination soon after exposure prevents the disease.

1. Wash the wound straight away with soap and water for at least **15 minutes**.
2. Apply an antiseptic such as povidone-iodine (Betadine), chlorhexidine or 70% alcohol.
3. See a doctor or go to hospital **the same day**, even if the person has been vaccinated.
4. Tell the doctor it was a bat, and call the **Public Health Unit on 1300 066 055**. They will arrange the vaccine and immunoglobulin. Record the incident as a workplace injury.

Bat saliva in the eyes, nose or mouth counts as exposure too. Droppings, urine and blood do not spread lyssavirus.

Food safety

Don't sell or pack fruit that flying-foxes have bitten or soiled. Lyssavirus doesn't spread through fruit or droppings, but droppings can carry bacteria, as any animal droppings can. We recommend you contact Freshcare or HARPS directly for more detailed information.

- **Pickers:** do not harvest plants showing signs of contamination and discard affected fruit. Assess any affected areas before harvesting
- **Records:** record bat activity and discarded fruit in your animal contamination records, and include bats in your Freshcare or HARPS risk assessment.
- **Packing shed:** keep bats out with netting or by closing doors at night. Clean droppings off surfaces and equipment before you pack.
- **Hygiene:** pickers wash their hands before handling fruit, and always after touching nets or equipment soiled with droppings.

What you can and can't do

✓ You can	✗ You can't
Use full-exclusion netting: taut, with fine mesh you can't poke a finger through	Shoot, poison or trap bats. These are offences under the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016, and licences are no longer issued
Check nets every morning and repair holes	Use loose or wide-mesh netting that entangles bats
Pick ripe fruit early and clear fallen fruit every day	Free, move, feed or euthanase a bat yourself
Call WIRES for bats that are entangled, grounded or orphaned	Disturb or clear a roost camp without approval
Move dead bats with a shovel and gloves (see above)	Pick up a bat with bare hands, alive or dead
Use scare devices; they only work for a few nights	Keep a rescued bat or take it home

Sources: NSW Health, Rabies and Australian bat lyssavirus fact sheet; NSW Environment, Rescuing and rehabilitating flying-foxes; NSW Environment, Flying-foxes and commercial crops. **General information only, not legal or medical advice**. October 2026.