



Manage the risks of your rainwater tank becoming contaminated

Do flying foxes visit your residential area?

Flying foxes (or fruit-bats) often feed at night on native and introduced tree species in residential areas.

These mammals carry a range of potentially harmful microorganisms.

If flying foxes are present around your residential area and occupying locations on or above roofs, guttering or rainwater tanks, there is potential for them to contaminate the rainwater.

This could happen when contaminated material (faecal material from the animals) containing viruses, bacteria or other microorganisms, collects on the roof and gets washed into the rainwater tanks.

FITZROY
RIVER WATER
Business Unit of RRC

Flying foxes as sources of disease

Hendra virus - To date there is no evidence that Hendra virus can be transferred from flying foxes directly to humans. While Hendra and other viruses have been detected in the saliva, urine, faeces and blood of flying foxes they do not survive for extended periods of time outside of the host animal (carrier). This means that the risk to human health posed by viruses entering rainwater tanks is typically very low – with the virus unlikely to survive long enough to cause lasting contamination of the water and an infection risk.

Australian Bat Lyssavirus - is a virus that is able to be transmitted directly from flying foxes to humans. Lyssavirus is related to the rabies virus and is usually transmitted by direct physical contact (e.g. through a scratch or bite) and can be fatal following infection and the onset of disease.

It is advisable not to make physical contact with flying foxes or approach them in a manner that increases the risk of being scratched or bitten.

Faecal contamination - Like all mammals, flying foxes contain potentially harmful bacteria in their intestines. Faecal bacteria and other microorganisms are able to last for an extended period of time depending on the amount of contaminating material that enters the tank. These bacteria and other microorganisms have the potential to cause gastroenteritis. Typically, the risk of faecal contamination of water by low numbers of flying foxes is no different to that risk posed by birds or other mammals such as possums or cats. However, if increased numbers of flying foxes, birds or other animals frequently visit your property, extensive soiling of the roof and other surfaces with faecal matter represents an increased risk to human health.

How to reduce risks

If managed well, rainwater tanks can continue to provide a source of water suitable for drinking or other domestic purposes. There are several things you can do to help reduce the likelihood of your rainwater tank becoming contaminated:

- Install a first flush device to divert the initial dirty water flow away from the tank;
- Use a 1mm (or less) mesh screen to prevent material from entering the tank when roof run-off water is collected;
- Inspect tank for bottom sediments and flush tank to remove debris if possible (every 6 to 12 months);
- Prune or remove all overhanging vegetation and debris from roofs, gutters or tanks (every 3 to 6 months);
- Check for evidence of animal access to tank and repair and close any openings to the tank (every 6 months); and
- Regularly disinfect the rainwater tank by adding a suitable disinfectant (e.g. 40mL of liquid sodium hypochlorite per 1000L of water).

Maintaining safe rainwater for drinking purposes requires this small amount of maintenance to help ensure that the rainwater supply is free of contamination.

For further information on managing rainwater tanks contact Rockhampton Regional Council on 4932 9000 or 1300 22 55 77.