



**Media Release – embargoed before Nov 17**

### **Seriousness of animal bites under-recognised in Australia**

One in two Australians are bitten by an animal at least once in their lifetime and 2% of the population is bitten each year, according to a review article published in the latest issue of *Emergency Medicine Australasia*, the journal of the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine.

The paper, by Dr David Looke and Dr Claire Dendle, specialists in infectious diseases specialists, summarises relevant research studies on particular infections that can be transmitted from animals.

In addition to the injuries sustained from animal bites, which can range from minor abrasions to amputation of limbs and death, the authors say both doctors and the community need to be aware that serious infection can occur.

The risk of infection following bites differs amongst animal species and is dependent on animal dentition and oral flora.

Most bites (85-90%) are from dogs, they said, with the main risk factors being young children, males, certain dog breeds, and unrestrained dogs.

Other animals likely to attack include cats (5-10%), rodents (2-3%), humans (2-3%), native mammals or marsupials, reptiles, monkeys and marine animals.

Two fatal cases of Australian bat lyssavirus have been reported. All bat bites are high risk and should receive post-exposure treatment for rabies.

Human bites have a higher complication and infection rate than do animal bites, and hepatitis B and C may be transmitted.

HIV transmission is rare from human bites but has occurred on at least five occasions.

“Because only a small proportion of bite wounds are seen by doctors, these represent a very small fraction of what is a large public health problem,” said Brisbane-based Dr Looke.

“Government legislation regarding limitation of dangerous breeds, mandatory dog sterilisation and restraint of dogs on leads, differs between Australian states, and prevention of bites thorough government policy and responsible pet ownership is paramount in reducing this serious problem.”

Animals are an important part of Australian culture, with 64% of households owning a pet and the pet care industry contributing \$4 billion to the economy annually.

**FURTHER INFORMATION:**

Dr David Looke can be contacted through Marilyn Bitomsky (see below)

Australasian College for Emergency Medicine, phone 03 9320 0444.

Issued for the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine by Marilyn Bitomsky, phone 07 3371 3057 or 0412 884 114.

Alternative media contact if Marilyn is unavailable: Kerry Reeves, phone 07 3882 1068 or 0407 036 791

Note: The 25th annual scientific meeting of the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine will be held at the Wellington Convention Centre in New Zealand 23-27 November 2008.