



Buruli ulcer and Australian possums

Reporting & sample collection info for veterinarians



Buruli ulcer (BU) is an **ulcerative bacterial skin disease** caused by infection with *Mycobacterium ulcerans*. Human cases are reported in parts of Victoria, far north Queensland and occasionally some other states. Mosquitoes appear to be involved with transmission of BU in Australia. Animals can also get BU: ringtail and brushtail possums seem particularly susceptible to infection, with lesions typically seen on faces, paws and tails. Current knowledge about the disease in possums is limited, but research is ongoing.



What can be done for possums with BU?

There are currently **no protective vaccines or treatments** for possums with BU. Severely affected possums can have multiple large ulcers that can expose bones and joints, and are usually euthanised on humane grounds. The **transmission risk to people is low**, however possum handlers should **wear appropriate PPE to prevent bites or scratches**. Any bites or scratches from possums should be promptly washed, disinfected and covered.

How can you report BU in possums in Victoria?

Cases of **ulcers in dead possums** can be reported to Pam Whiteley at the Melbourne Veterinary School (contact via 0400 119 301 or pamw@unimelb.edu.au). Any **sick or injured possums** can be reported to Wildlife Victoria via their 'Report a Wildlife Emergency' webform (click [here](#) or scan QR code on right) or on 03 8400 7300.



Sample collection and laboratory testing for BU in possums

Confirmation of BU in possums is important for ongoing research. Vets can take plain **microbiological swabs of lesions** and send them to the Mycobacterium Reference Lab, VIDRL, Doherty Institute, Melbourne (email maria.globan@vidrl.org.au). **Details about the possum's location and history** should be provided on the **sample submission form**, available [here](#) or via the QR code on left. Please note: these services are performed **subject to lab resourcing availability**.

