

Rabies Post Exposure Fact Sheet for the Public

Important Information about Rabies and Rabies Treatment

What is Rabies?

- Rabies is a disease that affects the brain and spinal cord.
- It is caused by a virus that lives in the saliva (spit) of infected animals.
- You can get rabies when the virus in an infected animal's spit enters your bloodstream. This happens when an infected animal bites or scratches you, or licks a cut or wound.
- You can also get rabies when spit from an infected animal comes into contact with the lining of your mouth, nose or eyes.
- Animals that can carry rabies are bats, skunks, foxes, raccoons. Cats and dogs that have not had rabies needles can also carry and spread rabies.
- If untreated it is 100% fatal.

What is the treatment for Rabies?

- If you are exposed to rabies, you will need injections (shots) with 2 different medications – **Rabies Immune Globulin and Rabies Vaccine**. This treatment works best when you receive it as soon as possible after being exposed to rabies.
- If the animal is caught and can be tested for rabies then the treatment can wait until the test results show whether or not the animal has rabies.

INFORMATION ABOUT RABIES IMMUNE GLOBULIN (RIG)

What is Rabies Immune Globulin (RIG)?

- RIG is a medication that contains antibodies. These antibodies can protect you if given within 24 hours of exposure to rabies. However, RIG does not offer long-lasting protection.
- RIG is made from the blood of people who have had shots to protect against rabies. The blood has been screened for certain diseases and treated to destroy viruses.
- You will need RIG only once. It is given as a shot. Some of the RIG may be injected in and around the bite/scratch. The rest may be injected in the buttocks.
- How much RIG you need depends on how much you weigh.

Talk to your Health Care Provider before you receive RIG

Your health care provider needs to know several things:

- Do you have an allergy to any ingredient in the RIG (human proteins, glycine and sodium chloride)?
- Have received RIG in the past?
- Have you already received more than one dose of Rabies Vaccine?
- Have you received a live vaccine in the last 2 weeks?
- Are you pregnant or breastfeeding?

What to expect after receiving RIG

Side effects from RIG may include:

- soreness at the site of the shot that may last a few hours (the most common side effect)
- stiff muscles in the area where the shot was given that may last for one or two days
- fever that may last for one or two days

INFORMATION ABOUT RABIES VACCINE

What is Rabies Vaccine?

- Rabies Vaccine is a medication that triggers the body to make its own antibodies. These antibodies give long lasting protection.
- The vaccine will not give you rabies.
- Rabies Vaccine is given as a series of shots in the muscle of the upper arm. The shots must be given on a **strict** schedule. You must receive all of the shots in order for the vaccine to provide the best protection against rabies.

Treatment Schedule

- A person who is exposed to rabies and has never had rabies vaccine should receive one dose of RIG and a series of Rabies Vaccine shots.
- If you have previously received Rabies Vaccine, you should talk with your health care provider and/or Public Health Services. This will help them to decide how many doses of Rabies Vaccine you need.
- **To get the best protection against rabies you must follow the treatment schedule and receive all doses of medication that you need.**

Talk with your Health Care Provider before you receive Rabies Vaccine

Your health care provider needs to know several things:

- Are you allergic to any ingredient in the vaccine (amphotericin B, chlortetracycline, human serum albumin, neomycin, phenol red indicator, polygeline, ovalbumin).

- Do you have a weakened immune system because:
 - You have a disease that affects your immune system?
 - You are receiving drugs that affect your immune system?
 - You have cancer or are being treated for cancer treatment with drugs or radiation?
- Are you pregnant or breastfeeding?

What to expect after getting Rabies Vaccine

Side effects from the vaccine may include:

- soreness, redness and/or swelling at the site of the shot that may last for one or two days
- mild flu-like symptoms such as headache, fever, nausea, fatigue or muscle aches that may last for one or two days

As with any medication, there is always the slight chance of a severe allergic reaction to RIG or Rabies Vaccine. Severe reactions can include: hives, swelling of the face, trouble breathing, weakness, or racing heart. To be safe, you should always be **observed for 15 minutes** after getting RIG and/or Rabies Vaccine.