Rabies Immune Globulin Information Sheet

What is rabies disease?
Rabies is a serious infection caused by a virus that affects the central nervous system (brain and spinal cord). The virus can occur in wild and domestic animals including bats, cats, coyotes, dogs, ferrets, foxes, raccoons, skunks and wolves. Rabies can infect any mammal.

How is rabies spread?
Rabies virus is found in the saliva of an infected animal and can be passed to humans through a bite, scratch or a lick on an open wound. Rarely, transmission has been recorded from transplanted grafts/ organs from patients with undiagnosed rabies.

What are the symptoms of rabies?
Early symptoms of rabies may include:
• headache
• fever
• numbness at the site of the bite or scratch
• irritability
• a sense of worry
Symptoms can begin anytime from a few days to years following exposure, depending on the site of the bite and the severity of the wound.
The disease progresses quickly to confusion, seizures, paralysis and death.
There is no treatment for rabies disease and it is almost always fatal once symptoms begin.

How can rabies be prevented?
People who are at high risk of contact with animals infected with rabies can receive rabies vaccine. Rabies can also be prevented by early treatment if you have been bitten, scratched or licked by an animal that may have rabies infection.

What is rabies immune globulin?
Rabies immune globulin (Rablg) is a sterilized blood product prepared from human blood plasma, which contains concentrated amounts of rabies antibodies. Antibodies are substances in the blood created to fight infections. Rablg is given to a person who may have been exposed to rabies virus to help them fight off rabies disease. The person will have immediate protection, but this lasts only a short time. Rabies vaccine should also be given with the Rablg. When a person receives a vaccine, the body will create its own antibodies - a process which takes time. Several doses of vaccine are required for long-lasting protection.

Is rabies immune globulin safe?
Rablg is among the safest blood products available. Canadian Blood Services carefully screens donors and tests all blood plasma collected. In addition, the product is treated with heat and chemical processes to eliminate any other germs in case they are missed during the screening process. Rablg does not contain any preservatives.

Who should get rabies immune globulin?
Rabies immune globulin is given to a person who has been exposed to an animal that is known or thought to be infected with the rabies virus.
**Who should not have rabies immune globulin?**

Because rabies can be fatal there are very few people who should not receive RabIg if it is recommended following possible exposure to rabies. Talk to your public health nurse or health care provider if you have:

- a history of severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to an immune globulin or any of its components
- had an unusually severe reaction to an immune globulin in the past
- any disorder that would contraindicate intramuscular injection (i.e., severe thrombocytopenia)
- an isolated IgA deficiency
- received rabies vaccine in the past (RabIg may not be needed)

People, who have received a live vaccine (e.g., measles, mumps, rubella or varicella containing vaccine) in the 14 days before receiving RabIg may need to have the live vaccine repeated. Those who receive RabIg should postpone receiving live vaccines for at least 4 months. RabIg may interfere with the development of antibodies to these specific live vaccines. Talk to your public health nurse or health care provider for more information.

**What are the possible side effects to rabies immune globulin?**

Most people have no reactions to the product. Reactions that do occur are typically mild.

Possible reactions include:

- tenderness, soreness or stiffness of the muscles at the injection site
- headache, fever and tiredness
- itchiness, swelling, skin rash can rarely occur.

As with any injection, unexpected or unusual side effects can occur. This includes severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis).

**What should you do if you have a reaction to rabies immune globulin?**

- Apply a cool moist cloth where the needle was given to reduce the pain and swelling
- Take a medication such as acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol®) to reduce the pain.
  - Aspirin® (ASA) is not recommended for individuals under 19 years of age.
- Report any unusual reactions to Health Link Alberta

For health advice and information 24 hours a day, seven days a week, call **Health Link Alberta** at:

- 403-943-5465 in Calgary
- 780-408-5465 in Edmonton
- Toll free 1-866-408-5465 elsewhere in Alberta


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