

Rabies Immune Globulin (RIG)

Get protected, get immunized.

- Vaccines make your immune system stronger. They build antibodies to help prevent diseases.
- Immunization is safe. It is much safer to get immunized than to get these diseases.

What is rabies immune globulin (RIG)?

RIG is made from blood and contains antibodies to rabies. It gives fast protection, but the protection is not long lasting.

When you get RIG, you also start a rabies vaccine series so that your body can make its own antibodies for long-lasting protection.

What is rabies disease?

Rabies disease is an infection caused by a virus that affects the nervous system (brain, spinal cord, and nerves). It is usually fatal once symptoms start.

Early symptoms include headache, fever, pain, and feeling tired. Symptoms change quickly to confusion, feeling very nervous or anxious (agitation), being unable to move (paralysis), and then death.

Symptoms can start as early as a few days or as late as several years after contact with the virus. How soon symptoms start depends on where and how serious the wound is.

Deaths from rabies are rare in North America. But worldwide, about 59,000 people die from rabies every year.

Who is most at risk?

People who have close contact with animals and lab workers who handle the rabies virus are at higher risk.

If you are travelling, the risk of rabies depends on where you are travelling, how long you are travelling, what activities you are doing, and the medical care in that area.

Children are at high risk because they are more likely to approach animals and might not tell someone if they do get a bite or scratch. They are also more likely to have high-risk animal bites (such as a bite on the face or more serious wounds).

How does it spread?

Rabies disease spreads from the saliva (spit) of an infected animal to humans through a bite, scratch, or lick on an open wound.

The most common animals that carry rabies in Canada are bats, skunks, raccoons, and foxes.

Stray dogs are the most common animal that carry rabies in Asia and Africa, where most rabies deaths happen.

Who should get RIG?

You might need RIG if you have had an animal bite or there is a risk you have had contact with rabies disease. If you have already had rabies vaccine and a blood test shows you are protected for rabies, you may not need RIG.

How many doses do I need?

You need 1 dose of RIG as soon as possible after a high-risk animal exposure (an animal bites you, scratches you, or licks you on an open wound).

How well does RIG work?

RIG provides fast protection against rabies. You will also get a dose of rabies vaccine. In Canada, there have been no cases of rabies when RIG and rabies vaccine were given as recommended. In other countries, there have been cases of rabies, but RIG and rabies vaccine were not given as recommended.

Is RIG safe?

RIG is one of the safest blood products available. Canadian Blood Services carefully screens donors and tests all blood. Blood is not used if the donor has risk factors or tests positive for an infectious disease. RIG is treated with heat and chemicals to kill germs. The risk of getting an infection from RIG is very small.

Where can I get RIG?

If an animal bites you or you think you may have a risk of rabies, call Health Link at 811.

If you need RIG and rabies vaccine you will get them at a hospital, urgent care centre, or your local public health office. It is important to get all doses of rabies vaccine exactly as recommended.

Are there side effects from RIG?

There can be side effects from RIG, but they tend to be mild and go away in a few days. Side effects may include:

- redness, a hard spot, or feeling sore where you had the needle
- a headache
- feeling unwell
- a fever

It is important to stay at the hospital or the clinic for 15 minutes after you have RIG. Some people may have a rare but serious allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. If anaphylaxis happens, you will get medicine to treat the symptoms.

It is rare to have a serious side effect. Call Health Link at 811 to report any serious or unusual side effects.

How can I manage side effects?

- To help with soreness and swelling, put a cool, wet cloth over the area where you had the needle.
- There is medicine to help with fever or pain. Check with your doctor or pharmacist if you are not sure what medicine or dose to take. Follow the directions on the package.
- Some people with health problems, such as a weak immune system, must call their doctor if they get a fever. If you have been told to do this, call your doctor even if you think the fever is from RIG.

Who should not get RIG?

You can get RIG if an animal with a risk of rabies (such as a wild animal or an animal you do not know) bites you, scratches you, or licks you on an open wound. Talk to your healthcare provider before you get RIG if you:

- have an allergy to any part of the immune globulin
- had a severe (serious) or unusual side effect after this immune globulin or one like it
- have had rabies vaccine
- have low or no immunoglobulin A in your blood (IgA deficiency)

Check with your doctor or public health nurse before you get RIG.

You can still have RIG if you have a mild illness such as a cold or fever.

What vaccines protect against rabies?

For long-term protection, you need to be immunized with rabies vaccine.

Can RIG affect any vaccines I have had?

RIG can interfere with live vaccines. You need to wait at least 4 months after having RIG before you can have a live vaccine. Before you get a live vaccine, tell your healthcare provider if you had RIG in the last 4 months. If you had a live vaccine less than 14 days before having RIG, ask a public health nurse if you need the live vaccine again.

I have a fear of needles. How can I prepare for immunization?

Many adults and children are afraid of needles. You can do many things before, during, and after immunization to be more comfortable.



Scan the QR code, visit ahs.ca/vaccinecomfort, or call Health Link at 811 for more information.

For more information about immunization



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