

## Rabies Immune Globulin (RIG)

### Immunization protects you from disease. Get protected, get immunized.

- Immune Globulins are needed for fast but short term protection.
- For long term protection, get immunized.

#### What is Rabies Immune Globulin (RIG)?

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

When RIG is given, a rabies vaccine series is started so that the body can make its own antibodies for long lasting protection.

#### Who should have RIG?

You may be offered RIG if you have had an animal bite or if there is a risk you have been in contact with rabies disease.

#### How many doses of RIG are needed?

You need one dose of RIG as soon as possible after a high risk animal bite. The size of the dose depends on the person's body weight.

#### How well does RIG work?

There have been no cases of rabies in Canada after RIG and rabies vaccine were given as recommended. In other countries, there have been cases when RIG and rabies vaccine doses were not given exactly as recommended.

#### Is RIG safe?

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

#### Where can I get RIG?

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

If RIG and rabies vaccine are needed, they will be given 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, swelling, or feeling sore where you had the needle
- feeling tired or unwell
- headache
- fever

Hives and general swelling may occur.

It is important to stay 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 dosage to take. Follow the directions on the package.
- Children under the age of 18 years should **not** take aspirin because it can cause serious health problems.
- 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 the vaccine.

## Who should not have RIG?

After a high risk animal bite, anyone can have RIG, but talk to your healthcare provider before having RIG if you:

- have an allergy to parts of the immune globulin
- had a severe or unusual side effect after this immune globulin or one like it
- have an 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. Always tell your healthcare provider if you have allergies or if you have had a side effect from an immune globulin in the past.

RIG can interfere with live vaccines. You need to wait at least 4 months after having RIG before you can have a live vaccine. If you had a live vaccine less than 14 days before having RIG, ask a public health nurse if the live vaccine needs to be repeated.

## For More Information



Call Health Link at 811



Go to [ImmunizeAlberta.ca](https://www.immunizealberta.ca)



Go to [MyHealth.Alberta.ca](https://www.myhealth.alberta.ca)

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# Facts about rabies disease

## 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 and change quickly to confusion, agitation, paralysis, and death.

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

Deaths 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 for exposure to the virus.

For those who travel, the risk depends on the country, length of the trip, the activities, and access to medical care.

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 being bitten on the face or more serious wounds).

## How does it spread?

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

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

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