

Rabies (RAB) Vaccine

Immunization protects you from disease. 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 this disease.**

What is the rabies vaccine?

The rabies vaccine protects against the rabies virus.

Who should have the rabies vaccine?

You may be offered this vaccine if you:

- had an animal bite
- have had contact with rabies disease
- work with animals at risk for rabies (such as veterinarians, animal control, animal lab and research, SPCA or Humane Society, or wildlife workers)

Talk to your workplace health and safety department or a public health nurse to find out if you can get the vaccine for free.

You may also benefit from the vaccine if you:

- volunteer with animals
- travel to an area that has a high risk of rabies
- do activities where there is a risk of rabies, such as spelunking or caving

If you are getting the vaccine for these reasons, then it is not free.

If you cannot get the vaccine for free, check with your health insurance provider to see if your plan covers the cost.

How many doses do I need?

If you are getting the vaccine because of work, travel, or other activities, you need 3 doses given over 3 to 4 weeks.

If you are getting the vaccine because you had an animal bite or were exposed to rabies disease, you will get:

- 2 doses if you have had rabies vaccine before
 - 4 or 5 doses if you have never had rabies vaccine.
- You will also need rabies immune globulin (RIG) with the first dose of vaccine.

Some people, such as those who work with animals or those with a weak immune system, need a blood test after all their doses to make sure they are protected. You may need to get another dose if the blood test shows you are not protected. Check with your healthcare provider to see if you need a blood test.

It is very important to get all doses of rabies vaccine on schedule. Get your doses on the days your healthcare provider recommends.

How well does the vaccine work?

After the recommended doses of vaccine, almost 100% of people are protected.

There have been no cases of rabies in Canada in people who had an animal bite or contact with rabies and got rabies vaccine and RIG as recommended. In other countries, there have been cases of rabies, but in those cases rabies vaccine and RIG were not given exactly as recommended.

Where can I get rabies vaccine?

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

If you need rabies vaccine for work, contact the public health office in your area. (Exceptions: In Edmonton, contact East Edmonton Public Health Centre at 780-342-4700, press 1 for Public Health. In Calgary, contact the non-routine immunization clinic at 403-955-9397.)

If you want the vaccine and need to pay for it, contact a travel health clinic or talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

Are there side effects from the rabies vaccine?

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

- redness, swelling, bruising, itching, or feeling sore where you had the needle
- feeling tired
- headache
- feeling dizzy
- fever or chills
- body aches
- not feeling hungry or not wanting to eat (poor appetite)
- feeling sick to your stomach (nausea), stomach pain, vomiting, or loose stool (diarrhea)
- swollen lymph nodes
- rash
- hives and swelling in some parts of your body (more common with a booster dose)

It is important to stay for 15 minutes after your vaccine. 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 the rabies vaccine?

Talk to your healthcare provider before having rabies vaccine if you:

- have an allergy to parts of the vaccine
- had a severe or unusual side effect after this vaccine or one like it

You can still have the vaccine 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 a vaccine in the past.

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)

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). Once symptoms start, most people will die from rabies.

Early symptoms include headache, fever, pain, and feeling tired. Symptoms change quickly to feeling confused, 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 many years after the animal bite or contact with rabies. 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.

For those who travel, the risk depends on the country, length of the trip, what they will be doing, and access to medical care.

Children are at higher risk because they are more likely to approach animals, and they might not tell someone if they get a bite or scratch. They are also more likely to have a high-risk animal bite (such as being bitten on the face or getting 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, and foxes.

Stray dogs most commonly carry rabies in Asia and Africa, where most rabies deaths happen.