

## Rabies Vaccine (RAB)

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

- Vaccines make your immune system stronger by building antibodies, which help prevent diseases.
- Immunization is safe. It is much safer to get immunized than to get this disease.

### Who should have rabies vaccine?

You may be offered this vaccine if you have had an animal bite or if there is a risk of you being in contact with rabies disease.

This vaccine is given to employees who work with animals at risk for rabies (e.g., animal control, veterinary, animal lab and research, SPCA/Humane Society, wildlife employees). Talk to your workplace health and safety department or a public health nurse to find out if you can get the vaccine for free.

Volunteers who work with animals, travellers to rabies risk areas, and people who take part in recreational activities where there is a risk of rabies (e.g., spelunkers/cavers) may benefit from this vaccine, but it is not free. Check with your health insurance provider as some plans may cover the cost.

### Where can I get rabies vaccine?

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

If you need rabies vaccine for work, contact the public health office in your area. (Exceptions: In Edmonton Zone, contact the Immunization Business Unit at 780-735-0100. In Calgary Zone, contact Calgary CDC at 403-955-6750.)

If you do not qualify for free vaccine, you need to pay for it and should contact a travel health clinic (e.g., [AHS Travel Health Services](#)) or speak to your doctor or pharmacist.

### How many doses of this vaccine are needed?

If you need the vaccine because you are working with animals or are travelling, you will need 3 doses given over 3 to 4 weeks. Some people need a blood test after finishing the series to see if they are protected. You may need to get another dose if the blood test shows you are not protected. People working with animals need ongoing blood tests to be sure they are protected. Check with your healthcare provider.

If you have had an animal bite or may have been exposed to rabies and the healthcare provider says you need rabies vaccine, you will get:

- 2 doses if you have had rabies immunization 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.

It is very important that rabies vaccine doses are given on time—get your doses exactly as recommended by your healthcare provider.

### How well does rabies vaccine work?

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

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

## Are there side effects from rabies vaccine?

Reactions to the vaccine are usually mild and go away in a few days. They may include:

- redness, swelling, bruising, and discomfort where the needle was given
- headache or dizziness
- feeling tired or having body aches
- poor appetite, nausea, vomiting, stomach pain, or diarrhea
- fever or chills
- swollen lymph nodes
- rash
- hives (more common with booster dose)

It is important to stay for 15 minutes after immunization because people can have a rare but serious allergic reaction (anaphylaxis). If anaphylaxis happens, you will be given medicine to treat the symptoms.

Unusual reactions can happen. Call Health Link at 811 to report any unusual reactions.

### How can I manage side effects?

- To help with discomfort and swelling, put a cool, wet cloth over the area.
- If you need fever or pain medicine, check with your pharmacist or doctor. Do not give aspirin to anyone younger than 19 years old because it can cause serious health problems.

- Some people with health problems (e.g., weak immune system) must call their doctor whenever they get a fever. If you have been told to do this, call your doctor—even if you think the fever was due to immunization.

## Is there anyone who cannot have rabies vaccine?

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

- have an allergy to parts of the vaccine—always tell your healthcare provider about allergies.
- had a severe or unusual reaction after this vaccine (or a similar one)—always tell your healthcare provider if you have had reactions.

You can be immunized if you have a mild illness (e.g., cold), even if you have a fever.

### For More Information



Call Health Link at **811**



Go to **immunizealberta.ca**



Go to **myhealth.alberta.ca**

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# Quick Facts: Rabies Disease

### What it is

- rabies is caused by a virus that affects the nervous system
- it is usually fatal once symptoms start
- early symptoms (e.g., headache, fever, pain, tiredness) change quickly to confusion, agitation, paralysis, and death
- symptoms can start as early as 9 days or as late as several years after the animal bite or exposure, depending on where and how serious the wound is
- deaths are rare in North America, but worldwide about 55,000 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 higher 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 higher risk animal bites (e.g., more serious bites, bites on the face).

### How it spreads

- spread from the saliva of an infected animal to humans through a bite, scratch or a lick on an open wound
- the most common carriers of rabies in Canada are bats, skunks, raccoons, or foxes
- stray dogs are the most common carriers in Asia and Africa, where most rabies deaths happen