

Public Health
Central Zone

Date: Friday, August 09, 2019

To: Central Zone Family and Emergency Medicine Physicians; Emergency Department Staff; U of A Rural Family Medicine Program; Nurse Practitioners; Chief Zone Officer and Medical Director; Medical Affairs; Emergency Disaster Management; Senior Operating Officers; Executive Directors; Red Deer Directors; Communications; Communicable Disease Control, Public Health Managers; Environmental Public Health; Infection Prevention control

From: Central Zone MOH's (Drs. Ifeoma Achebe, Digby Horne and Mohammed Mosli)

Re: Increased Demand for Rabies Post-Exposure Prophylaxis

Dear colleagues:

Demand for rabies vaccine and rabies immune globulin (RIG) has risen sharply in recent weeks following media reports of a B.C. man's death from rabies in July. This increase in demand is being attributed to increased awareness among Albertans about rabies and the risk associated with physical contact with bats. To date, Alberta Health has been able to meet this demand.

The risk of rabies infection remains extremely low in Alberta. Only two Albertans have been diagnosed with rabies since 1924; the most recent case occurred in 2007. Vaccination is only required for post-exposure prophylaxis if there has been contact with a bat or potentially rabid animal (note that in Alberta, the only rabies-endemic species is bats), and for pre-exposure prophylaxis for individuals with a high risk of rabies exposure, e.g. veterinarians, laboratory workers, and certain travellers.

Given the increase in demand for post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), as a precaution, Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services (AHS) are taking steps to maximize the effective use of the current supply. The Central Zone Medical Officer of Health (MOH) on-call, through Communicable Disease Control (CDC), provides instructions to Camrose and Red Deer Emergency Departments (EDs) concerning rabies post-exposure prophylaxis, including the use of RIG and the administration of the initial dose of the rabies vaccine series. Public Health Nurses complete the vaccine series at Community Health Centres (CHCs), following directions of the MOH and the AHS Provincial Immunization Program.

At the current time, changes to the process that your patients may experience include:

- A delay in access to pre-exposure rabies vaccinations. The Alberta Health Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH) has advised AHS to temporarily stop administering pre-exposure vaccinations, except in those who are at immediate high risk of exposure to rabies disease. Any pre-exposure case thought to be high-risk must be assessed by the Central Zone MOH and undergo an approval process by the CMOH.

- Possible changes to route of administration of rabies immune globulin and vaccine, dependent on the administration setting (EDs vs CHC) and opportunities for simultaneous prophylaxis of two or more patients. These changes could include following World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines for post-exposure administration of rabies vaccine using the intra-dermal route¹, as well as minimizing the intramuscular administration of RIG, as is being done B.C.² Both measures permit a reduced amount of product to be used.

Alberta Health and AHS continue to monitor the situation and will make adjustments to pre and post-exposure prophylaxis processes as necessary. Please continue to report exposures to potentially rabid animals to Environmental Public Health ph: 1-866-654-7890. Questions or concerns should be directed to the MOH on-call ph: 403-356-430.

Your attention and assistance is appreciated.

¹https://www.who.int/immunization/policy/position_papers/pp_rabies_summary_2018.pdf?ua=1

¹http://www.bccdc.ca/resource-gallery/Documents/Guidelines%20and%20Forms/Guidelines%20and%20Manuals/Epid/CD%20Manual/Chapter%201%20-%20CDC/Interim_RIG_Guidelines.pdf