

Date: August 7, 2019
To: Zone Family Medicine and Emergency Medicine Physicians
From: Medical Officers of Health – South Zone
Notice: Rabies Post-Exposure Prophylaxis Increasing Demand

Demand for rabies vaccine and rabies immune globulin 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 dangers of bat exposure. 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, and the most recent case occurred in 2007. Vaccination is only required for post-exposure prophylaxis if there has been contact with a bat or rabies-infected animal (note that in Alberta, the only rabies-endemic species is bats), and for pre-exposure prophylaxis for individuals that anticipate they may be in a situation(s) with a high risk of rabies exposure, e.g. veterinarians and laboratory workers.

Given the increase in demand for post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), as a precaution, Alberta Health is taking steps to maximize the effective use of the current supply. **Please continue to follow your existing Zone process for consulting and reporting to Public Health on exposures to animals.** The local Medical Officer of Health will continue to provide recommendations on rabies pre- and post-exposure prophylaxis.

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

1. A delay in access to pre-exposure rabies vaccinations. The Chief Medical Officer of Health has advised Alberta Health Services 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 Medical Officer of Health and undergo an approval process.
2. Possible changes to route of administration of rabies immune globulin and vaccine, as recommended by the Medical Officer of Health. These measures include following World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines for post-exposure vaccine by intra-dermal route¹ when possible, as well as rabies immune globulin (RIG)-sparing measures similar to the approach being taken in B.C.²

Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services continue to monitor the situation and we will adjust our approach as needed to continue protecting the public health.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact one of the South Zone Medical Officers of Health listed below.

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

²http://www.bccdc.ca/resource-gallery/Documents/Guidelines%20and%20Forms/Guidelines%20and%20Manuals/Epid/CD%20Manual/Chapter%201%20-%20CDC/Interim_RIG_Guidelines.pdf