

Rabies Immune Globulin (RIG)

Get protected, get immunized.

- Immune globulins are passive immunization agents. This means they give quick, short-term protection.
- For long-term protection, you need a vaccine.

What is rabies immune globulin?

Rabies immune globulin (RIG) is made from blood and contains antibodies to rabies. It gives fast protection, but the protection is not long lasting.

When you get RIG, you also start a rabies vaccine series so that your body can make its own antibodies for long-lasting protection.

What is rabies disease?

Rabies disease is an infection caused by a virus that affects the nervous system (brain, spinal cord, and nerves).

How does it spread?

Rabies disease spreads from the saliva (spit) of an infected animal to humans through a bite, scratch, or a lick on an open wound or mucus membrane (such as your mouth, nose, or eyes).

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

Dogs are the most common animal that carry rabies in Asia and Africa, where most human deaths from rabies happen.

What are the symptoms?

Early symptoms include headache, fever, pain, and feeling tired. Symptoms change quickly to feeling confused, nervous, or anxious (agitation), and paralysis (being unable to move part of your body).

In the advanced stage of rabies, people may have severe spasms in the throat that lead to fear of water and swallowing liquids, fear of air and drafts, and then death.

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

Once symptoms start, people usually die from rabies.

See reverse for more information.

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.

If you are travelling, the risk of rabies depends on where you are travelling, how long you are travelling, what activities you are doing, and the medical care in that area. Check with a travel immunization clinic for more information.

Children are at high 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 a bite on the face or more serious wounds.

Who can get RIG?

You might need RIG if you had an animal bite or possible contact with rabies.

Talk to your healthcare provider before you get RIG if:

- You have an allergy to any part of the immune globulin.
- You had a severe (serious) or unusual side effect after this immune globulin or one like it.
- You have had rabies vaccine.
- You have low or no immunoglobulin A in your blood (IgA deficiency).

You can still have RIG if you have a mild illness such as a cold or fever.

You may not need RIG if you have had rabies vaccine previously and a blood test showing you are protected for rabies.

How many doses do I need?

You need 1 dose of RIG as soon as possible after a high-risk animal exposure such as an animal bite, scratch, or a lick on an open wound or mucus membrane (mouth, nose, or eyes). You will also need doses of rabies vaccine.

How well does RIG work?

RIG provides fast protection against rabies.

In Canada, there have been no cases of rabies when RIG and rabies vaccine were given as recommended.

Is RIG safe?

RIG is a safe blood product. The risk of getting an infection from RIG is very small.

Canadian Blood Services carefully screens donors and tests all blood. Blood is not used if the donor has risk factors or tests positive for an infectious disease. RIG is treated with heat and chemicals to kill germs.

Where can I get RIG?

If you had an animal bite or possible contact with rabies, call Health Link at 811.

If you need RIG and rabies vaccine, you will get them at a hospital, urgent care centre, or your local public health or community health centre. 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 where you had the needle that may look red on lighter skin or purple on darker skin
- a hard spot or feeling sore where you had the needle
- a headache
- feeling tired
- feeling dizzy or feeling faint
- trouble sleeping
- a fever
- body aches or sore joints
- stomach pain, feeling sick to your stomach (nausea), vomiting (throwing up), loose stool (diarrhea), and gas (flatulence)
- nasal congestion, sore throat, cough, or runny nose
- bruising
- sunburn
- blood in urine

It is important to stay at the hospital or the clinic 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 healthcare provider if you are not sure what medicine or dose to take. Follow the directions on the package.
- Some people with health problems, such as a weakened immune system, must call their healthcare provider if they get a fever. If you have been told to do this, call your healthcare provider even if you think the fever is from RIG.

What vaccine protects against rabies?

The rabies vaccine protects against the rabies virus. For long-term protection, you need to be immunized with rabies vaccine.

What if I had or I am getting another type of vaccine?

RIG can interfere with live vaccines. You need to wait at least 4 months after having RIG before you can have a live vaccine. Before you get a live vaccine, tell your healthcare provider if you had RIG in the last 4 months.

If you had a live vaccine less than 14 days before having RIG, ask your healthcare provider or a public health nurse if you need the live vaccine again.

I have a fear of needles. How can I prepare for my immunization?

Many adults and children are afraid of needles. There are things you can do before, during, and after immunization to be more comfortable.



Scan the QR code, visit ahs.ca/vaccinecomfort, or call Health Link at 811 for information.

For more information about immunization



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Scan the QR code or go to ahs.ca/immunize