



Whatcom County Health Department
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COMMUNICABLE DISEASE PROGRAM ALERT August 14, 2009

CHANGES TO RABIES POST - EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) has voted to decrease the number of rabies vaccine doses administered for post-exposure prophylaxis. Now only 4 doses are needed, not 5 doses. A summary of the 4 dose regimen is as follows:

Post - Exposure Prophylaxis for Unvaccinated Persons

A regimen of 4 one-ml doses of rabies vaccine should be administered intramuscularly to previously unvaccinated persons **with no immune suppression**. The first dose should be given as soon as possible after exposure. The first dose is counted as day 0 of the series. The next doses are given on day 3, 7, and 14 after the first vaccination. The site of administration remains unchanged.

Rabies Immune Globulin

There are no changes for the dosage and administration of Rabies Immune Globulin.

Post - Exposure Prophylaxis for Previously Vaccinated Persons

There are no changes for the post-exposure management of previously vaccinated persons.

Post – Vaccination Serologic Testing

Only persons with immune suppression should be tested for post-vaccination seroconversion. A rabies virus neutralizing antibody serum specimen should be collected 1 to 2 weeks after completing the post-exposure series.

Precautions – Immunosuppression

Persons with broadly defined immunosuppression should receive **5 doses** of rabies vaccine. However immune response may still be inadequate. One or more serum samples should be tested for rabies neutralizing antibody by rapid fluorescent focus inhibition test (RFFIT). A person who fails to seroconvert after the 5th dose should be managed by their healthcare provider in consultation with the health department.

The 2008 ACIP recommendation for the prevention of human rabies is otherwise unchanged and can be found at: <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/PDF/rr/rr5703.pdf>

The Role of the Health Department

Rabies Risk Assessment

The Whatcom County Health Department (WCHD) assesses potential exposures to rabies and refers those with a risk of infection to their primary care providers for treatment. **We do not provide rabies PEP.**

We assess the exposure based on the nature of the contact with the animal, the animal species, its vaccination status, and the availability of the animal for testing or quarantine. Because rabies is always fatal once symptoms develop (with only two recent exceptions), PEP is recommended if there is the possibility of an exposure. PEP is the only measure that can prevent the disease. For unvaccinated persons, PEP includes both rabies immune globulin (RIG) and vaccine.

We have posted guidelines for rabies PEP on the WCHD Communicable Diseases website for health care professionals at:

www.whatcomcounty.us/apps/healthcms/

This is accessible only on HInet or PeaceHealth computers. See the link at the bottom right of the HInet home page. Call WCHD at 676-6724 if you need further information or do not have HInet access.

The Role of the Healthcare Professional

Arrange PEP

- If you are seeing a patient for rabies post-exposure prophylaxis **who has not been referred** by our department, you will need to call and report the case. The report line number is 738-2503. We may call you to document dates of vaccine & RIG administration in order to complete the necessary case report.
- A public health nurse will notify your office regarding the patient's exposure and our recommendations. Your office staff should route these phone messages or faxes to a health care provider as soon as possible. The patient will have been instructed to call your office to arrange for the vaccinations.
- Prompt administration of vaccine and RIG is important. Do not delay starting PEP unless there is a recommendation to wait for test results or for completion of quarantine. Follow the PEP recommendations closely.
- You may want to review your patient's health insurance and coordinate with the health care plan. Vaccine and RIG are very costly. Costs are approximately \$1,500 - \$2,000 per patient, not including medication administration charges or the office visit charge.
- If you are unable to provide post-exposure rabies vaccinations and RIG for your patients, you may call the Ambulatory Care Unit at St. Joseph Hospital and make arrangements for care. You will need to complete a Doctor's Order "Rabies Exposure Routine Orders" which is available through the hospital, and online on HInet on Crossroads at the Ambulatory Care Order Set site at http://crossroads/sc_acu_wha/
- Patients who are exposed to rabies, but without wounds (bat in the bedroom scenario) should not be referred to the ER. Please use the SJH order set and have your office set up patient appointments through the Ambulatory Care Unit.