

Rabies (RAB) Vaccine

Get protected, get immunized.

- Vaccines make your immune system stronger. They build antibodies to help prevent diseases.
- Immunization is safe. It is much safer to get immunized than to get these diseases.

What is the rabies vaccine?

The rabies vaccine protects against the rabies virus.

What is rabies disease?

Rabies disease is an infection caused by a virus that affects the nervous system (brain, spinal cord, and nerves). Once symptoms start, people usually die from rabies.

Early symptoms include headache, fever, pain, and feeling tired. Symptoms change quickly to feeling confused, feeling very nervous or anxious (agitation), being unable to move (paralysis), 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 wound is.

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).

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.

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 rabies deaths in humans happen.

Who should get the rabies vaccine?

You may get this vaccine if:

- You had an animal bite.
- You have had contact with rabies disease.
- You work with animals at risk for rabies (such as veterinarians and veterinary technicians, animal control, animal lab and research, SPCA or Humane Society, or zoo and wildlife workers).

Talk to your workplace health and safety department or a public health nurse to find out if you can get the vaccine for free.

You may also benefit from the vaccine if:

- You volunteer with animals.
- You travel to an area that has a high risk of rabies.
- You do activities where there is a risk of rabies, such as spelunking or caving.

If you are getting the vaccine for these reasons, then it is not free.

If you cannot get the vaccine for free, check with your health insurance provider to see if your plan covers the cost.

How many doses do I need?

If you are getting the vaccine because of work, travel, or other activities, you need 3 doses over 3 to 4 weeks.

If you are getting the vaccine because you had an animal bite or contact with rabies, you will get:

- 2 doses if you have had rabies vaccine before
- 4 or 5 doses if you have never had rabies vaccine, as well as a dose of rabies immune globulin (RIG) with the first dose of vaccine.

Some people, such as those who work with animals or those with a weak immune system, may need a blood test after all their doses to make sure they are protected. You may need to get another dose if the blood test shows you are not protected. Check with your healthcare provider to see if you need a blood test.

It is very important to get all doses of rabies vaccine on schedule. Get your doses on the days your healthcare provider recommends.

How well does the vaccine work?

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

In Canada, there have been no cases of rabies in people when RIG and rabies vaccine were given as recommended. In other countries, there have been cases of rabies in people, but RIG and rabies vaccine were not given as recommended.

Where can I get rabies vaccine?

If you had an **animal bite** or **you think you had contact with rabies**, call Health Link at 811. If rabies vaccine is recommended, you will be told where to go to get the vaccine.

If you need **rabies vaccine for work**, contact your local public health or community health centre, unless you are in Edmonton or Calgary:

- In Edmonton, contact East Edmonton Public Health Centre at 780-342-4700 and choose the option for Public Health.
- In Calgary, contact the non-routine immunization clinic at 403-955-9397.

If you want the vaccine and need to pay for it, contact a travel health clinic or talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

Are there side effects from the rabies vaccine?

There can be side effects from the rabies vaccine, but they tend to be mild and go away in a few days. Side effects may include:

- redness, bruising, itching, a hard spot, or feeling sore where you had the needle
- feeling tired or unwell
- a headache
- feeling dizzy
- a fever or chills
- body aches or sore joints
- not feeling hungry or not wanting to eat (poor appetite)
- feeling sick to your stomach (nausea), stomach pain, vomiting (throwing up), or loose stool (diarrhea)
- swollen lymph nodes
- a rash
- hives and swelling in some parts of your body (more common with a booster dose)
- sore throat, cough, or runny nose

At least 1 out of 100 people who got this vaccine reported 1 or more of these side effects. In some cases, it is unknown if the vaccine caused these side effects.

It is important to stay for 15 minutes after your vaccine. 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 doctor or pharmacist 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 weak immune system, must call their doctor if they get a fever. If you have been told to do this, call your doctor even if you think the fever is from the vaccine.

Who should not get the rabies vaccine?

If you had contact with rabies, get rabies vaccine right away.

Talk to your healthcare provider before getting rabies vaccine if:

- You have an allergy to any part of the vaccine.
- You had a severe (serious) or unusual side effect after this vaccine or one like it.

Although you can get the vaccine if you have a mild illness such as a cold or fever, you should stay home until you are feeling better to prevent spreading your illness to others, unless you had contact with rabies.

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

Many adults and children are afraid of needles. You can do many things 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



Call Health Link at **811**



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