



# RABIES VACCINE

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



### 1. What is Rabies ?

- ***Rabies is a serious disease. It is caused by a virus.***
- Rabies is mainly a disease of animals. Humans get Rabies when they are bitten by infected animals.
- At first there might not be any symptoms. But weeks, or even years after a bite, Rabies can cause pain, fatigue, headaches, fever, and irritability. These are followed by seizures, hallucinations, and paralysis. **Rabies is almost always fatal.**
- Wild animals are the most common source of human Rabies.  
**Dogs and cats can also transmit the disease.**
- Rabies cause about 40,000 - 70,000 Rabies-related deaths each year.
- **Bites from unvaccinated dogs cause most of these cases.**

### 2. Rabies vaccine:

**Rabies vaccine can prevent Rabies.**

**Rabies vaccine is made from killed Rabies virus. It cannot cause Rabies.**

- Rabies vaccine is given to people at high risk of Rabies to protect them if they are exposed. It can also prevent the disease if it is given to a person after they have been exposed.

### 3. Who should get Rabies vaccine and when ?

**- Preventive vaccination (no exposure):**

- International travelers who are likely to come in contact with animals in parts of the world where Rabies is common.
- People whose activities bring them into frequent contact with Rabies virus or with possibly rabid animals.
- People at high risk of exposure to Rabies, such as veterinarians and animal handlers.

***The pre-exposure schedule for Rabies vaccination are 4 doses.***

**- Vaccination after an exposure:**

**Anyone who has been bitten by an animal, or who otherwise may have been exposed to Rabies, should see a doctor immediately.**

- A person who is exposed and has never been vaccinated against Rabies should get 5 doses of Rabies vaccine - one dose right away, and additional doses on the 3rd, 7th, 14th, and 28th days. **They should also get a shot of Rabies Immune Globulin\* at the same time as the first dose.** This gives immediate protection.
- A person who has been previously vaccinated should get 2 doses of Rabies vaccine - one right away and another on the 3rd day. **Rabies Immune Globulin is not needed.**

### 4. Some people should not get Rabies vaccine or should wait:

- Anyone who has ever had a serious (life-threatening) allergic reaction to a previous dose of Rabies vaccine, or to any component of the vaccine.
- Anyone who has a weakened immune system because of HIV/AIDS or another disease that affects the immune system.
- Anyone who having treatment with drugs that affect the immune system, such as steroids.
- Anyone who has cancer, or is undergoing cancer treatment with radiation or drugs.

If you have a minor illness, such as a cold, you can be vaccinated. If you are moderately or severely ill, you should probably wait until you recover before getting a routine (non-exposure) dose of Rabies vaccine.

**If you have been exposed to Rabies virus, you should get the vaccine regardless of any other illnesses you may have.**

## 5. What are the risks from Rabies vaccine ?

A vaccine, like any medicine, is capable of causing serious problems, such as severe allergic reactions. The risk of a vaccine causing serious harm, or death, is extremely small. Serious problems from Rabies vaccine are very rare.

### *Mild problems:*

- Soreness, redness, swelling, or itching where the shot was given (30% - 74%).
- Headache, nausea, abdominal pain, muscle aches, dizziness (5% - 40%).

### *Moderate problems:*

- Hives, pain in the joints, fever (about 6% of booster doses).
- Illness resembling Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS), with complete recovery (very rare).

Other nervous system disorders have been reported after Rabies vaccine, but this happens so rarely that it is not known whether they are related to the vaccine.

## 6. What if there is a moderate or severe reaction ?

### *What should I look for ?*

- Any unusual condition, such as a serious allergic reaction, high fever or unusual behavior. Serious allergic reactions are extremely rare with any vaccine. If one were to occur, it would be within a few minutes to a few hours after the shot. Signs can include difficulty breathing, hoarseness or wheezing, hives, paleness, weakness, a fast heart beat or dizziness.

### *What should I do ?*

- Call a doctor, or get the person to a doctor right away.
- Tell your doctor what happened, the date and time it happened, and when the vaccination was given.

## 7. How can I learn more ?

- Ask your doctor or nurse. They can give you the vaccine package insert or suggest other sources of information.
- Contact the American Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):  
Visit CDC websites at: [www.cdc.gov/nip](http://www.cdc.gov/nip)