

What is rabies post-exposure treatment?

Post-exposure treatment involves a course of four rabies vaccines given over 21 days. For higher risk wounds, a medicine called immunoglobulin is also given – this is injected into and around the bite or scratch.

If you have had a full course of pre-exposure vaccines before you travelled, you will only need two additional rabies vaccines after a bite or scratch and will not need immunoglobulin. Remember to take your record of vaccinations with you so that the doctor can ensure you get the right treatment.

For people with a weakened immune system, the post-exposure treatment needed may be slightly different.

Further information

NHS

www.nhs.uk/conditions/rabies

The Green Book

www.gov.uk/government/publications/rabies-the-green-book-chapter-27

TravelHealthPro

www.travelhealthpro.org.uk/factsheet/20/rabies

UK Health Security Agency

www.gov.uk/government/collections/rabies-risk-assessment-post-exposure-treatment-management

 **#BeRabiesAware**

Information for health professionals

Health professionals advising travellers can use the TravelHealthPro website country information pages (www.travelhealthpro.org.uk/countries) to see if rabies is present in any animals, including bats, at a specific destination.

If a patient presents following a bite, scratch or lick from an animal (including a bat) abroad, you must ensure a risk assessment is carried out and they are given appropriate post-exposure treatment (rabies vaccine +/- immunoglobulin).

For specialist advice, support on completing the rabies risk assessment and provision of rabies vaccine for post-exposure treatment, please contact UKHSA's Rabies and Immunoglobulin Service (RIgS).

Health professionals can contact

the UKHSA RIgS team on 0330 128 1020;

or your local health protection team – see

www.gov.uk/health-protection-team

for contact details.

NHS


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NHS

Rabies

Information for travellers



What is rabies?

Rabies is a rare but very serious infection of the brain and nerves. It is almost always fatal once symptoms appear. Rabies is spread to people by contact with saliva from an infected wild or domestic animal, usually through a bite, scratch or a lick to broken skin.

Rabies is found throughout the world, particularly in Asia, Africa, and parts of Central and South America. Dogs are the cause of most rabies infections in people. However, all animals can catch rabies and pass it on, including cats, monkeys and bats.

Rabies is prevented by a course of vaccines given promptly after an exposure to animal saliva (post-exposure treatment). Travellers at higher risk of rabies exposure may also choose to have vaccines before a potential exposure, but post-exposure treatment is still necessary.

What should I do before travelling?

Check whether you are visiting a place where rabies is present in animals. You can look up the country you're visiting on the TravelHealthPro country information pages (www.travelhealthpro.org.uk/countries) or speak to a GP or travel clinic for more information.

Consider having a course of pre-exposure rabies vaccines, especially if you are travelling to countries where rabies is known or thought to occur and you are:

- undertaking activities that might put you at greater risk of contact with animals (e.g. cycling, running)
- visiting remote areas, where medical care and rabies post-exposure treatment may not be available
- working with animals

What should I do while I am abroad?

Avoid contact with any wild animals (including bats), domestic animals or pets. Do not touch or feed animals, even within temples, zoos or sanctuaries. Be careful not to attract stray animals by dropping litter or offering them food.

Rabid animals may behave strangely or seem unusually tame, but some may not have any signs that they are infected.

Remember to take a written record

of your rabies vaccination with you

when you travel abroad

Children are at greatest risk of rabies as they are more likely to touch animals and may not tell their parents/guardians. If you're travelling with a child, make sure they're aware of the dangers and that they should tell you if they've been bitten, scratched or licked. Supervise babies and young children closely around animals and check them for any wounds if they come into contact with an animal.

What should I do if bitten, scratched or licked by an animal?

1. Immediately wash and thoroughly flush the area with soap and lots of water.
2. Seek medical attention locally – **do not wait until you return to the UK**. Even if you have had rabies vaccine before travelling, it is still important to seek medical advice promptly.
3. If advised, start the rabies post-exposure treatment abroad and do not wait until you get back to the UK.
4. But **always** contact your GP on return to the UK, even if you received post-exposure treatment abroad or the exposure happened several weeks ago. You may need to continue a course of rabies vaccines. If you have a record of any treatment given, remember to bring this with you. Your GP will also be able to arrange for post-exposure treatment if this hasn't been started while you were abroad, but is considered necessary by UKHSA.

