



Rabies Vaccine

What You Need to Know

Deployment Medication Information Sheets (DMIS) are provided by the U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine (USACHPPM). Written for soldiers and their families, they provide basic information on deployment medications that are intended as guidance only; consult your health care provider for more information.

What is rabies?

Rabies is a viral disease that infects the central nervous system. It causes dysfunction of the brain tissues and ultimately death. Symptoms include fever, headache, and depression, which can lead to insomnia, anxiety, confusion, slight or partial paralysis, excitation, hallucinations, agitation, hypersalivation, difficulty swallowing, hydrophobia (fear of water), and death.

How do you get rabies?

Rabies is most often transmitted through the bite of a rabid animal.

Who should get the vaccine and how is it given?



- The rabies vaccine is recommended for international travelers based on the incidence of rabies in the country visited, the availability of anti-rabies treatment in the country visited, and the intended activity.
- At-risk groups include veterinarians, animal handlers, field biologists, spelunkers, and certain laboratory workers.
- For international travelers, the risk of rabies is highest in areas of the world where dog rabies exists, including parts of Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, India, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Viet Nam. The disease is also found in dogs in most of the other countries of Africa, Asia, and Central and South America.
- Vaccination is important for persons at high risk of being exposed in countries where the locally available rabies vaccines may carry a high risk of adverse reactions.
- Vaccination prior to being exposed to rabies does not eliminate the need for additional therapy after a rabies exposure, but treatment is simpler. It eliminates the need for rabies immune globulin (RIG) and decreases the number of doses of vaccine required.
- Your health care provider will give you the vaccine in three doses, on days 0, 7, and 21 or 28.
- The need for routine booster doses of the vaccine depends on risk. Booster immunization is required every 2 to 5 years when the antibody titer falls below an acceptable level.

What does the military require?

The vaccine is required for persons occupationally at risk of exposure to rabid animals (e.g., animal handlers and certain laboratory, wildlife management, and security personnel) and persons assigned long-term to regions with endemic rabies, especially in dogs and cats.

Are there any side effects?

- You may have pain, redness, and swelling or itching at the injection site, or mild reactions such as headache, nausea, abdominal pain, muscle aches, and dizziness.
- A small number of persons receiving booster vaccinations may have an immune complex-like reaction characterized by rash or hives, itching, and weakness or fatigue.

Is there any reason I shouldn't get the vaccine?

- Tell your health care provider if you have any illnesses, infections, reactions to previous vaccinations, or allergies. If you have an infection at the time, your doctor may delay the vaccination until you are better.
- Tell your health care provider if you have an allergy to neomycin, gentamicin, or amphotericin B.
- Tell your health care provider if you're taking any over-the-counter or prescription medication, especially steroids or prednisone.
- Chloroquine phosphate (and possibly other antimalarials such as mefloquine administered for malaria chemoprophylaxis) may interfere with the antibody response to the rabies vaccine.

What if I'm pregnant or breast-feeding?

- The vaccine should be given during pregnancy only when clearly needed. Talk to your health care provider about the risks and benefits.
- It is not known if the vaccine appears in breast milk. Consult your health care provider before breast-feeding.

What should I do if I miss a dose?

If you miss a dose for any reason, get the missed dose as soon as possible and then continue the injection schedule. Do NOT re-start the vaccination series.

You can avoid getting rabies!

- Get each vaccination as scheduled.
- When traveling abroad, avoid direct contact with wild animals and be especially careful around dogs in developing countries.

Be sure the vaccination is recorded in your medical record.

Where can I get more information?

- Health care provider at your military treatment facility.
- Military Immunizations web page: <http://www.tricare.osd.mil/immunization/vaccines.html>
- CDC Specific Disease web site: www.cdc.gov/health/diseases.htm

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