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Limited Supply of Rabies Vaccine and Immunoglobulin

Attention: Physicians, Hospitals, CNE, ER Manager, ER Physician, Community Health Centres, Walk-In Urgent Care Clinics, Nurse and Nurse Practitioners, Ontario Health, Ontario Health Teams, Family Health Teams, Indigenous Healthcare & Community, Long-Term Care Homes, Corrections, Ontario Health Central

Date: January 29, 2025.

SMDHU received notice on January 24th from the Ministry of Health of a provincial supply shortage due to an increase in demand for publicly funded rabies vaccine and rabies immunoglobulin, used for post-exposure prophylaxis (rPEP) in the management of potential human exposures to the rabies virus. Based on information provided, it is anticipated that the current provincial supply will not be replenished before April 2025. In the interim, a limited supply of rabies immunoglobulin and vaccine is available locally.

Given the supply challenges, the Ministry has requested that local public health units ensure that the administration of rPEP is aligned with the current [Ministry of Health Management of Potential Rabies Exposures Guideline, 2020](#).

SMDHU is requesting a **thorough risk assessment** be conducted for all reported potential rabies exposures, and that public health be consulted, prior to administration, for any instance where rabies vaccination may be indicated. For additional physician and client resources related to rabies, including assessment and rPEP administration tools, please visit our [Health Professionals Portal](#) on the SMDHU website.

Additionally, the Ministry recommendations are **to limit pre-positioned doses at external sites** (i.e., hospitals) to enable closer oversight and availability across our jurisdiction. Effective immediately, pre-positioned rabies rPEP hospital inventory levels will be limited until the provincial supply shortage is over.

A follow-up public health alert will be communicated once rabies vaccine supply is replenished and procedures can return to normal.

What should health care practitioners do when a patient presents with a bat, wildlife or domestic animal exposure?

1. Please complete the [Rabies and Animal Exposure Incident Report Form](#) and fax a copy of the completed *Form* through our **Designated Rabies Fax line** at 705-725-8132. Note: **Facial, neck or head bites from mammals** and **direct contact with wild animals or bats** are considered high risks exposures requiring immediate reporting to public health. Such incidents must be verbally reported to public health by calling **705-721-7520** or **1-877-721-7520** ext. **8811** (Monday – Friday 8:30am – 4:30pm) or after hours at **1-888-225-7851** (evenings, weekends or holidays).



2. For **all domestic animal exposures**, please determine if the animal owner contact information or animal location is known as rPEP will not be necessary if the animal is available for observation. For domestic animal exposures (such as a dog or a cat), SMDHU will implement a 10-days observation period, regardless of the rabies vaccination status of the animal, to ensure it is not infectious with the rabies virus.
3. For **bats or wild terrestrial animal exposures**, please ask the patient if they have the animal available for testing. If so, please provide information about the status and location of the animal in question when reporting to the health unit. If possible, the animals should be safely captured (or retrieved if dead) and tested for rabies when there has been a human exposure. Such testing can help to avoid or reduce rabies vaccination for exposed patients. Extreme care should always be taken to ensure that there is no further exposure when animal captured or handled. SMDHU staff are available to facilitate such testing. Unless exposure from a wild terrestrial animal or bat is to the head or neck region, rabies vaccine and immunoglobulin administration can be delayed for up to 48 hours until the rabies test result is obtained. If vaccination is initiated, it can be discontinued if the test is later found to be negative for rabies. Results are usually available within 48 hours; however, result times can occasionally take longer because of collection schedules, courier limitations and delays on weekends.

Human rabies is an extremely rare disease in Canada due to effective public health prevention and control measures and the availability of publicly funded rabies vaccines and immunoglobulins. Since reporting of the disease began in Canada in 1924, there have been a total of 27 cases of rabies in humans. In Ontario, the last human case was confirmed in September 2024 due to a direct bat exposure. Prior to this case, the last domestically acquired case of human rabies in Ontario was in 1967.

For **rabies vaccine and immunoglobulin releases**, or to consult with public health, please contact the Rabies Coordinator at **1-877-721-7520 ext. 8894 during business hours** or after hours at **1-888-225-7851**.