

Rabies

What is Rabies?

Rabies is a virus infection spread through the saliva of infected mammals. All mammals can carry rabies, but its most common in dogs, cats, monkeys, bats, raccoons, jackals and mongooses.

It causes inflammation of the brain and is nearly always fatal without appropriate treatment before symptoms develop.

Rabies is present on all continents except Antarctica. 95% of all reported human rabies deaths occur in Africa and Asia. Travellers are advised:

- Not to approach or pick up wild or domestic animals
- Not to attract stray animals by offering food or being careless with food litter
- Be aware that certain activities might attract dogs (e.g., running, cycling)
- Not to attempt to pick up an unusually tame animal or one that appears unwell.

Vaccination is recommended for:

- People travelling to countries where rabies is a risk especially in remote areas, where urgent access to medical facilities or treatment is unlikely to be available.
- Typically, those staying for a month or more or those travelling for shorter periods to countries where there is a risk of rabies
- Children who will reside in rabies affected countries
- Although the vaccine can be given at any age, the risk of animal bites may be higher once a child is able to crawl/walk independently. Children are often bitten around the face or head, which is considered a higher risk due to the expected shorter incubation period.
- Young children may also not tell you if they have been scratched or licked by a mammal
- People who work abroad where rabies is present and who by the nature of their work are at particular risk of contact with rabid animals e.g., vets, zoologists, or other animal handlers.
- People who regularly handle imported animals e.g. quarantine kennel workers
- People who regularly handle bats e.g. bat handlers

- Laboratory workers routinely working with rabies virus
- Health workers who are likely to come into close contact with someone with rabies disease.

Adults and children vaccine schedule:

3 doses in total on day 0, 7 and 21 or 28.

Alternatively, an accelerated course of primary pre-exposure immunisation may be given. Three doses of rabies vaccine should be given on day 0, 3 and 7 with an additional dose due at 1 year if travel to high risk areas continue.

A booster dose from 1 year can be considered dependent on your planned activities and risk. Your travel health advisor will discuss this with you.

Having rabies vaccine before you travel does not mean you do not need to do anything in the event of a possible rabies exposure whilst abroad

What should I do if I get bitten, scratched or licked?

If you are bitten, scratched, or licked over broken skin or on the face by a mammal you should:

- Immediately and thoroughly wash the area for 15 minutes using soap & water/detergent
- Apply a disinfectant to the wound such as povidone-iodine or 40-70% alcohol
- Gather as much information about the animal as possible
- Seek immediate medical attention about post exposure treatment as **you will require further vaccination, even if you have had a complete course of vaccine prior to travelling**
- If the wound requires stitching, this should be delayed until post exposure treatment has started.
- You may require antibiotics to prevent wound infection
- Tetanus may be necessary if not up-to-date.

For more information, please see:

<https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/factsheet/20/rabies>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/rabies/>