

RABIES

Rabies is a viral infection that causes a brain infection and is always fatal.

Symptoms of the disease usually appear after two to three months, but the incubation period can vary from one week to several years. A fatal outcome can only be prevented by immediate action following potential exposure.

The infection is transmitted through the inoculation of saliva from an infected mammal, via a bite or scratch, or by licking mucous membranes or an open wound. Rabies can also be transmitted through minor injuries, for example, when a bat makes contact with someone.

Injuries caused by bats are always considered a risk. To date, there have been no human cases of rabies caused by rodent bites, such as from rabbits, hares, or mice.

For travelers, high-risk incidents mainly involve dogs, cats, and monkeys.

RISK AREAS

Rabies is present worldwide.

In the Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia, Africa, and certain parts of Latin America, rabies affects, among other animals, pets such as dogs. In North America and parts of Eastern Europe, rabies occurs only in wild mammals. In other regions, such as Western Europe, it is found only in bats.

PREVENTION

- Avoid all contact with animals.
- Stay away from potentially infected mammals.
- Never touch animals, even if they are dead.
- Do not pet, feed, or play with them, even if they appear healthy and cute.
- Pre-exposure rabies vaccination.

Pre-exposure vaccination involves two doses at least one week apart. **In Belgium, the vaccines Rabipur® and Verorab® are available.**

After potential exposure, repeated injections (post-exposure vaccines) are required.

ACTIONS TO TAKE AFTER A RISKY CONTACT

Always :

- Wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water for 15 minutes, as the virus is very sensitive to detergents.
- Then carefully disinfect with iodine (e.g., iso-Bétadine®) or 60–80% ethanol.
- Consult a doctor as soon as possible to determine the post-exposure protocol (PEP), even if you have been vaccinated.

TRAVEL INSURANCE ASSISTANCE

Call your travel insurance assistance for advice about reliable medical facilities. Vaccines and immunoglobulins are not always available in (sub) tropical countries, so emergency repatriation may sometimes be necessary.

POST-EXPOSURE VACCINATION

After high-risk contact, a doctor will determine whether you need post-exposure vaccination (PEP).

- For people who have not received pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) against rabies, a series of four or five vaccines is required, sometimes along with rabies immunoglobulins.
- People with good immunity who have already received rabies PrEP need only two booster vaccines.

Waking Up in a Room with a Bat?

Bat bites often go unnoticed. Bats can transmit rabies. Consult a doctor as soon as possible to determine the appropriate follow-up.