



ALERT FOR CLINICIANS

Rabies post-exposure prophylaxis

KEY POINTS

- Increasing numbers of overseas travellers are returning to WA. Rabies is en-zootic in wild and domestic terrestrial mammals in most overseas countries (including Bali).
- Clinicians may need to access rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), which includes rabies vaccine and human rabies immunoglobulin (HRIG) (if indicated)
- Advice and approval to access PEP is available 24/7 via public health.
- During office hours, contact your [local public health unit](#). After hours, contact public health on-call (93280553).
- Rabies PEP is funded by the WA Department of Health regardless of Medicare eligibility.

Rabies exposure

- Rabies PEP is required for any potential exposures as rabies is almost invariably fatal.
- Potential exposures include bites, scratches or contact via mucous membranes or broken skin (e.g. licks), from any terrestrial mammal in countries where rabies is enzootic, and from bats anywhere in the world (including Australia).
- Potential exposures may also occur due to direct contact with bats even if bites or scratches are not apparent.
- Public Health England maintains a [list](#) of countries and their risk of rabies.

Post-exposure recommendations

- Provide immediate wound care (wash for 15 minutes with soap and copious water and apply a viricidal antiseptic solution, e.g. such as povidone-iodine or alcohol).
- PEP includes a rabies vaccine course (up to 5 doses) and, if indicated, human rabies immunoglobulin (HRIG).
- People who have begun PEP overseas still need urgent follow up as HRIG may not have been received in the country of exposure and must be given within 7 days of the first vaccine dose. The vaccine course will need to be reviewed and completed in Australia. Contact public health for advice and to organise vaccine delivery.
- Consideration should also be given to the possibility of tetanus and other wound infections, and appropriate measures taken.
- Further information is available from the [Australian Immunisation Handbook](#) and [CDNA Rabies and other Lyssavirus Public Health Guidelines](#).

Call your local public health unit and speak to the public health physician.

Metropolitan Perth 9222 8588 or 1300 623292	Kimberley 9194 1630	South West 9781 2359
Goldfields 9080 8200	Midwest 9956 1985	Wheatbelt 9690 1720
Great Southern 9842 7500	Pilbara 9174 1660	After hours (on-call) 9328 0553

Prevention

- People should be advised to avoid close contact with bats anywhere in the world.
- Overseas travellers should be advised to avoid close contact with wild or domestic terrestrial mammals (especially dogs, cats and monkeys).
- Pre-exposure vaccination with rabies vaccine is recommended for people whose occupation (including volunteer work) or recreational activities place them at increased risk of being bitten or scratched by bats. This is available from workplace and travel medicine clinics, and general practitioners at the patient's or their employer's cost.

Dr Jelena Maticovic

A/DIRECTOR, COMMUNICABLE DISEASE CONTROL DIRECTORATE

Access Clinician Alerts online at: [Clinician Health alerts – infectious diseases](#)