



Philadelphia Department of Public Health
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Health Update

Human Rabies Vaccine Supply Shortage: Information for Healthcare Providers September 6, 2008

Human rabies vaccine is currently in limited supply due to production shortages and high demand. To assure that rabies vaccine is used appropriately, consultation with public health officials is now required for animal exposures that require rabies post exposure prophylaxis (PEP). This update reviews the supply situation as of September 6, 2008, and provides recommendations for use in light of the restricted supply.

- Sanofi Pasteur is making IMOVAX (human diploid cell vaccine) available for rabies PEP only. Sanofi Pasteur requires a password and completion of a PEP form to order vaccine on a per patient basis. Healthcare professionals can contact Sanofi Pasteur at 1-800 VACCINE to purchase vaccine and to obtain the required form. The password will change weekly; a new password will go into effect each Monday.
- As of August 28, 2008, Novartis (manufacturer of RabAvert) had extremely limited supplies, and is only accepting new orders for individuals who require PEP and have had severe adverse reactions to IMOVAX. A password that changes weekly is also required to order vaccine from Novartis. The telephone number for Novartis is 1-800-244-7668.
- To obtain either vaccine, healthcare professionals in Philadelphia must contact staff in the Division of Disease Control (DDC), Philadelphia Department of Public Health (PDPH) to obtain approval for vaccine usage and obtain the necessary password to obtain vaccine. Healthcare providers can order a full series (e.g., 5 doses of vaccine) for patients at the time an order for rabies vaccine is placed. Patients should be instructed to return to the same institution to complete the vaccine series.
- Requests for vaccine for pre-exposure prophylaxis are on hold until more vaccine supplies become available.
- Decision-making regarding the need for rabies PEP should be guided by the following considerations:
 - Actual bites from known or suspect rabid animals are the highest risk for rabies. Every effort should be made to test wild animals for rabies (e.g., raccoons, bats, skunks, foxes, groundhogs/woodchucks, etc.) that were involved in human exposures. If the bite is recent and the animal is available for testing, the administration of PEP can be withheld until the results of testing. Contact DDC to arrange for testing of suspect animals.

- Bites from healthy, domestic animals are at lower risk for rabies. Every effort should be made to locate and confine these animals (e.g., dogs, cats, ferrets) involved in bite cases for 10 days of observation. This requires reporting the exposure to DDC (24/7 reporting line: 215-685-6748). DDC staff will forward the animal exposure report to the PDPH Vector Control Program, which will attempt to locate the animal. The animal's location and owner information should be included with the bite report.
- Non-bite exposures very rarely cause rabies. Non-bite exposures are defined as contamination of open wounds, abrasions (including scratches) or mucous membranes with saliva or other potentially infectious material (e.g., neural tissue). Other indirect contact or activities (e.g., petting or handling an animal, contact with blood, urine, feces or contact of saliva with intact skin) do not constitute exposures.
- Bites from squirrels, hamsters, guinea pigs, gerbils, chipmunks, rats, mice, other small rodents, rabbits and hares almost never require rabies post-exposure prophylaxis. Consult with DDC staff if you believe rabies PEP might be indicated following an exposure to one of these animals.
- Rabies PEP for persons exposed to bats should be limited to:
 - Cases of recognized bites, if the bat is unavailable for testing, or;
 - Cases where a sleeping person, incapacitated person, or very young child has been in a room with a bat that is not available for testing. If the bat is available for testing, provision of PEP should be based on test results. Other household members do not need PEP in this situation.

Clinicians are referred to the following sources of information regarding rabies vaccine and the management of animal exposures:

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Rabies website - www.cdc.gov/rabies. The site is updated continually to reflect the current status of rabies vaccine supply
- Current guidelines for rabies vaccine usage, in "Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Human Rabies Prevention – United States, 2008. Recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices. MMWR 2008;57 (No. RR 3)," available at www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5703a1.htm
- The DDC Health Information Portal:
<https://hip.phila.gov/xv/DiseaseInformation/AnimalBites/tabid/133/Default.aspx>

Staff from DDC can be reached for public health consultation and vaccine password information at 215-685-6740. On weekends and after normal business hours, contact 215-686-1776 and ask to speak with the person on-call for the division.