

Rabies

Rabies is a rare but serious infection that's usually caught from a bite or scratch of an infected animal. It's almost always fatal once symptoms appear, but vaccination and early treatment can prevent it.

Rabies is a dangerous viral infection endemic to many countries.

The rabies vaccine is used to prevent an infection prior to travelling to a high risk area.

Rabies is found throughout the world, but it's very rare in the UK.

Although the risk of getting it while travelling is small, rabies is more common in parts of:

- Asia
- Africa
- Central and South America

Symptoms of rabies usually take 3 to 12 weeks to appear, but they can appear after a few days or not for several months or years.

Symptoms include:

- numbness or tingling where you were bitten or scratched
- seeing things that are not there (hallucinations)
- feeling very anxious or energetic
- difficulty swallowing or breathing
- being unable to move (paralysis)

Once symptoms appear, rabies is almost always fatal.

Treatment for possible rabies

If you've been bitten, scratched or licked by an animal that may have rabies, a doctor will check if you need treatment.

Treatment usually involves:

- 2 or more doses of the rabies vaccine
- a medicine called rabies immunoglobulin, a liquid given into the wound or by injection (this is only needed if you've not had the rabies vaccine before or have a weakened immune system)

If treated quickly, treatment is usually very effective at preventing rabies. Rabies cannot be treated if symptoms appear.

Rabies vaccination

The rabies vaccine is recommended if you're travelling to a part of the world where rabies is more common, especially if:

- you're going somewhere where it may be hard to get medical help quickly
- you might come into contact with infected animals (for example, you'll be doing lots of outdoor activities like cycling or running)
- you're staying for over a month

Some people at risk of rabies through their work should also get vaccinated.

You should aim to get your first dose ideally five weeks before travelling to ensure you will be able to complete the course in time.

- The course consists of three vaccines. The second dose is given seven days after the first dose. The third dose should be given three weeks after the second dose.
- you're travelling at short notice, you may be able to have the third dose two weeks after the second.
- The requirements for booster doses is dependent on an individual's likely frequency of ongoing exposure to the rabies virus.
- Injection in the upper arm.
- Side effects include – The vaccine can cause mild side effects such as rash, a high temperature, nausea or muscle aches.
- The rabies vaccine can be given from birth.
- **Additional precautions:** Avoid touching animals while abroad. If you are bitten or scratched by any animal, wash the wound and seek medical attention immediately.