

## **Appendix – Information for the Public:**

# **Exposure to Rabies: What to Do, and What is Rabies Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (Rabies PEP)?**

If you have been bitten or scratched by a domestic or wild mammal, or otherwise had contact with the saliva or the brain/nervous tissue from any domestic, feral or stray or wild mammal (including bats), you may have been exposed to rabies. Rabies is a serious disease that is nearly always fatal if not promptly treated by a doctor. Follow these important steps to prevent rabies and other infections that can be transmitted by animals.

- **Wash all wounds and exposed areas with soap and running water for 15 minutes.**
- **Call local animal control to capture the animal.** Domestic pets (dogs, cats, ferrets), livestock and horses need to be held and observed for 10 or 15 days for signs of illness, depending on the species. Wild animals and hybrids (wolf hybrids, etc.) must be submitted for rabies testing. (Find a local animal control agency at [www.ncarca.org/agencylistings.asp](http://www.ncarca.org/agencylistings.asp).)
- **Call your county local health department communicable disease nurse** to report the bite and to discuss the details of your exposure (animal species and behavior, circumstances, etc.) to determine if you need to contact a doctor about rabies risk assessment and possible treatment to prevent rabies, which is called “rabies post-exposure prophylaxis,” or “rabies PEP.” Rabies PEP involves several vaccinations spaced several days apart (see “What is Rabies PEP like?” below). Find your local health department (LHD) at [www.ncalhd.org/county.htm](http://www.ncalhd.org/county.htm).
- **Contact or visit a healthcare provider to assess the need for wound care, tetanus prevention, further rabies risk assessment and treatment.** If you need rabies PEP to prevent rabies, you will most likely have to be treated at the hospital emergency department.
- **If you need rabies PEP:**
  - **Rabies PEP should begin immediately if you have been exposed to the rabies virus.**
  - Ask your local health department (LHD) communicable disease nurse where you should go to get rabies PEP.
  - If you have a bite wound, you will most likely have to visit the hospital emergency department on the first day of the vaccination regimen for wound care and to begin rabies PEP. Most health departments do not treat wounds, nor can they provide both of the required vaccinations on the first day of the regimen. However, some health departments may be able to provide the followup vaccinations.
  - If you do not have insurance, do not qualify for Medicaid and your family income is less than the federal poverty level, you may qualify for the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services Indigent Program. Your LHD CD nurse will help you apply for this assistance. Some manufacturers of rabies vaccine also offer patient assistance programs for people who are underinsured

or do not have health insurance (see the CDC web site at [www.cdc.gov/rabies/medical\\_care/programs.html](http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/medical_care/programs.html)).

- **What is rabies PEP like? How many doses of vaccine will I need?**
  - Current rabies vaccines are relatively painless and administered in the arm like a flu vaccine. If, like most people, you have never received a rabies vaccine regimen before, you will require four (4) doses of rabies vaccine over a 14-day time frame (Days 0, 3, 7 and 14). The day you begin the schedule is Day 0 and includes human rabies immune globulin as well as the first dose of rabies vaccine.
  - If you are immune-compromised as determined by your healthcare provider, your schedule will include a 5<sup>th</sup> dose of rabies vaccine on Day 28, and you will also be required to have blood drawn for a rabies titer (test) on Day 28 to ensure that your immune system has responded appropriately to the rabies vaccines.
  - If you have previously completed a pre- or post-exposure rabies regimen as determined by your healthcare provider, you will only require two (2) doses of rabies vaccine on Day 0 and Day 3.

**For more information, see these web sites:**

- N.C. Division of Public Health: Rabies (<http://epi.publichealth.nc.gov/cd/diseases/rabies.html>),
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): Rabies ([www.cdc.gov/rabies](http://www.cdc.gov/rabies))