

New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) Rabies Vaccine Policy

The New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) and the New Mexico Medical Society (NMMS) developed a policy regarding management of persons potentially exposed to rabies back in 1977. This policy has recently been reviewed by NMDOH and NMMS because of concerns that some healthcare providers and hospital pharmacists are not familiar with the recommended procedures for handling a potential exposure and whose management decisions were not consistent with national guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (*MMWR 1999;48:No. RR-1*).

NMDOH and NMMS strongly recommend that healthcare providers consult NMDOH when a potential rabies exposure has occurred (e.g., after an animal bite) and **prior to** administering rabies post exposure prophylaxis (PEP). Consultation is available from epidemiologists with **NMDOH Epidemiology and Response Division 24/7 by calling 505-827-0006**. NMDOH epidemiologists will help to systematically assess the risk of rabies exposure and need for rabies PEP and:

- Provide clinical consultation,
- Arrange for laboratory testing of animals if indicated,
- Help coordinate animal control services, and
- Distribute rabies PEP biologics when necessary. NMDOH pharmacy in Santa Fe stocks both rabies vaccine and rabies immune globulin and can ship it as expeditiously as possible (overnight UPS, courier, or personal transport)

Some hospital pharmacies around the state also stock a supply of both rabies vaccine and immune globulin. This may be advantageous when it has already been several days since a high-risk animal bite (such as a skunk or bat bite); however NMDOH **strongly** encourages hospital pharmacists not to release rabies PEP until the healthcare provider has consulted with NMDOH.

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One recent change in the rabies policy relates to releasing rabies PEP based only on a healthcare provider's request, regardless of NMDOH's recommendations, which had been the previous practice. After careful review of the policy and animal rabies in the state and region, NMDOH and NMMS have identified specific situations where initiating rabies prophylaxis is inappropriate unless additional steps have been taken to better assess the risk of rabies exposure (see below). In these circumstances, NMDOH shall reserve the right to refuse to provide rabies vaccine and immune globulin from the state pharmacy. Physicians could still have their hospital pharmacy order the vaccine directly from the manufacturer, although NMDOH would still strongly recommend against use of rabies PEP prematurely. The specific situations are:

- 1) A dog, cat or ferret bites a person and the animal is available for observation or testing. Prophylaxis is NOT necessary in this situation unless rabies is diagnosed in the animal. Rabies testing can be performed should the animal develop a suspect illness because the animal is under quarantine.
- 2) A dog, cat or ferret bites a person, the animal is not immediately available for quarantine, but the person can describe the animal and there is a reasonably likelihood of the animal being located. NMDOH recommends a delay in rabies

prophylaxis for up to 72 hours to allow animal control and/or bite victim time to locate the animal.

- 3) A dog, cat or ferret bites a person, the animal is not immediately available for quarantine, but the animal has been positively identified and there is a veterinary record that it has received 1 or more doses of rabies vaccine. No prophylaxis is necessary in this situation unless rabies is later diagnosed in the animal.

NMDOH and NMMS look forward to continuing this long-standing policy of providing consultation on potential rabies exposure and providing rabies PEP in appropriate situations. NMDOH has offered to provide educational seminars/grand rounds to healthcare providers and hospital pharmacists that include an overview of rabies epidemiology and the rabies PEP policy. For more information about scheduling a seminar, please call 505-827-0006.