



Gavin Newsom  
Mayor

## HEALTH UPDATE

October 3, 2008

### LIMITED SUPPLIES OF RABIES VACCINE:

#### POST-EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS IS AVAILABLE WITH PUBLIC HEALTH APPROVAL

Because of limited supplies of rabies vaccine nationwide, local health departments have been asked to help manage the supply by insuring that rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) vaccinations are given for appropriate indications. In San Francisco, bat bites and exposures present the greatest rabies risk. Bats are found inside, in between or close to San Francisco buildings most frequently between October and February. A press release advising people to avoid contact with bats and other wild animals that may carry rabies was issued by the San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFPDH) yesterday. This update, the press release and additional information are posted on the SFPDH website: <http://www.sfdcp.org/healthalerts>.

#### ACTIONS REQUESTED OF CLINICIANS:

1. Consider rabies PEP in persons with
  - possible exposure to a rabid bat
  - exposure to a bat that is unavailable for rabies testing
  - exposure to another possibly rabid animal.
2. Contact the **Communicable Disease Control Unit (CDCU) at (415) 554-2830** to report a known bite or possible exposure to a bat or other possibly rabid animal, and/or to discuss indications for PEP.
  - If rabies PEP is warranted, you will receive a password that allows purchase of rabies vaccine.
  - Please call even if your pharmacy has vaccine. This will prevent difficulties with patients if a series is initiated but subsequent doses are unavailable and purchase is not approved.

#### LIMITED SUPPLIES OF RABIES VACCINE

Rabies vaccine supplies are limited due to production facility renovations and insufficient stockpiles. Production should improve by mid-to-late 2009. Until then, vaccine is available for PEP but not for pre-exposure vaccination. After approval from the SFPDH Communicable Disease Control Unit (CDCU) at (415) 554-2830, human rabies vaccine may be ordered from Sanofi Pasteur, the manufacturer that is releasing rabies vaccine. Indications for PEP remain unchanged (see below). Human Rabies Immune Globulin (HRIG) supplies are adequate and may be ordered through normal procedures.

#### RABIES IN SAN FRANCISCO BATS

In San Francisco, all animal rabies cases in the past 60 years have occurred in bats. From 2004 to the present, 12 rabid bats have been identified in San Francisco (1 to 5 annually). The majority of cases in San Francisco that receive a recommendation for rabies PEP from Public Health have exposures from bats.

#### EVALUATING EXPOSURE RISK AND NEED FOR POST-EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS (PEP)

Rabies is fatal once symptoms develop. Incubation typically lasts 3-8 weeks, but has ranged from 9 days to 7 years. Rabies PEP can prevent disease if administered early and according to established recommendations. Decisions regarding the need for PEP are complex and involve the type of animal, its behavior, the type and circumstances of exposure, and the availability of the animal for diagnostic testing or observation in quarantine.

- Type of animal: in California, bats and skunks are at very high risk for having rabies. Foxes, feral cats, and raccoons, are also at high risk. Occasionally rabies has been found in California wildlife such as opossum and coyote. In the United States, rabies is uncommon in pet cats and dogs, horses, cows, or other domesticated animals, but can occur, especially if the animal is not up to date on rabies immunizations. Small, wild, free-living rodents such as mice, rats, squirrels, and gophers, or indoor pet

**Health Alert:** conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention

Page 1 of 2

**Health Advisory:** provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action

**Health Update:** provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action

rodents such as hamsters, gerbils, and guinea pigs are rarely infected with rabies, and in the United States have not been known to transmit rabies to humans.

- Health & behavior of the animal: rabies may be more likely in animals with neurologic signs such as paralysis or ataxia; behavioral changes such as new aggression or withdrawal; hypersalivation; or a change from usual nocturnal activity to daytime activity (such as in bats, skunks, raccoons, or foxes). A pet dog, cat, or ferret that is current on rabies immunization is less likely to be rabid.
- Type of exposure: bite exposures are higher risk than non-bite exposures. Bites to bare skin (more salivary contamination), head/neck (shorter incubation period), multiple bites, and severe bite wounds are higher risk. The exception is bat bites, which carry a high risk but which may not cause symptoms or even be recognized because most bats' teeth are tiny, like a 26-gauge needle. It may be impossible to rule out rabies exposure from a bat if the person was asleep, is an unattended child, or had an altered level of consciousness while in the same room with a bat, unless the bat tests negative for rabies by a public health laboratory. Human patients with rabies have been found to be infected with bat strains of rabies virus, even if they did not remember being bitten by a bat. **Rabies PEP may be appropriate in situations involving contact with bats, even if a bite is not apparent.** Non-bite exposures, where open wounds, abrasions or mucous membranes are contaminated by the saliva or neural tissue from a rabid animal, very rarely cause rabies.
- Circumstances of exposure: unprovoked exposures may indicate a higher risk of rabies. They are unusual and typically require an animal to cross a neutral space to attack. Examples of provoked exposures include trying to feed, pet, handle, or play with an animal; entering an animal's territory, including walking, running, or biking past it; approaching an injured animal; and attempting to separate fighting animals.
- Availability of animal for testing or observation: wild animals (including bats) that are promptly captured and euthanized are tested by the Public Health Laboratory, and the results may guide decisions about PEP. If a wild biting animal escapes or cannot be tested, decisions about PEP will depend upon evaluation of other risk factors. If the animal was a pet cat, dog, or ferret, it should be located and quarantined for 10 days. If the animal is healthy at the end of the 10 day quarantine, it does not have rabies and rabies PEP is not needed.

**Please call the Communicable Disease Control Unit at (415) 554-2830 to report a potential exposure, to discuss the need for PEP, and to receive authorization to order rabies vaccine for PEP.**

#### **ORDERING RABIES VACCINE** (See detailed instructions at <http://www.sfdcp.org/rabies>)

1. Obtain approval and a password from CDCU investigators (415) 554-2830. Please call the CDCU to discuss your case even if your pharmacy already had vaccine on hand. This will prevent the difficult situation with patients and their families if a series is initiated but subsequent doses are not available and purchase is not approved.
2. Give the password to your pharmacist for the purchase of rabies vaccine. Your pharmacist cannot purchase the vaccine without the password. The Sanofi Pasteur rabies vaccine order form can be obtained by contacting Sanofi Pasteur at 1-800-VACCINE.

#### **ADMINISTERING RABIES POST-EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS**

For details go to *What You and Your Physician Should Know about Rabies* at: <http://www.sfdcp.org/rabies>

#### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH): <http://www.sfdcp.org/rabies>
- California Department of Public Health (CDPH): <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/discond/Pages/rabies.aspx>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): <http://www.cdc.gov/rabies>
- Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices. Human Rabies Prevention—United States, 2008. MMWR 2008; <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr57e507a1.htm>
- SFDPH Adult Immunization Clinic (vaccine only; no HRIG): <http://www.sfdcp.org/aic>
- Rupprecht CE et al. Prophylaxis against rabies. NEJM 2004; 351:2626-35.
- San Francisco Animal Care & Control (for pick-up of bat or other wild or dead animal): 415-554-9400