

Rabies Vaccine: Postexposure

What to do if you've been exposed to the rabies virus

Rabies is a preventable viral disease of mammals, most often transmitted through the bite of a rabid wild animal (e.g., raccoons, skunks, bats). Rabies can be fatal to people and animals, so in the event of a known or possible exposure, it is necessary to receive a series of rabies vaccinations.

What to do if you've been exposed

If you believe you may have been exposed to the rabies virus, you must **contact Tompkins County Environmental Health (TCEH) right away at 607-274-6688** to report any bites or potential rabies exposure. You may also email TCEH at TCEH@tompkins-co.org. The office is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. TCEH staff will provide guidance about next steps, which may include rabies post-exposure vaccination. Learn more at tompkinscountyny.gov/health/rabies.

About the rabies post-exposure vaccine

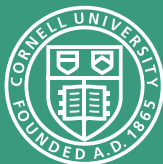
Rabies post-exposure vaccination includes getting multiple doses of vaccine—rabies vaccine and/or a passive antibody called HRIG (Human Rabies Immune Globulin)—as soon as possible after exposure. TCEH will inform you when and where to receive your vaccinations (some follow-up shots in the series can be received at Cornell Health).

- **For people who have NEVER been vaccinated against rabies:** vaccination should include administration of both passive antibody and vaccine.

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This combination of vaccines is recommended for both bite and non-bite exposures, regardless of the interval between exposure and the initiation of treatment.

- **For people who HAVE been previously vaccinated** or who are receiving “pre-exposure vaccination” for rabies (e.g. Vet students): vaccination should include only the regular rabies vaccine (not HRIG).

Vaccine timing: Day 0, 3, 7, 14 (& sometimes 28)

Rabies prevention is a serious matter and it is very important that vaccines be given on schedule. The first dose of vaccine administered is considered your “**Day 0**” dose. You will need to receive additional vaccinations on **Day 3, 7, and 14**. Individuals with compromised immunity may need to get a fifth dose of vaccine on **Day 28**.

Side effects

It is common to experience mild local reactions at the vaccine site (soreness, redness, swelling or itching). Some people also experience headache, nausea, abdominal pain, muscle aches or dizziness. Serious side effects are very rare. You can call Cornell Health any time to discuss any concerns you have about a reaction: 607-255-5155.

Coverage for rabies vaccines

If you are covered by Cornell’s Student Health Plan (SHP), rabies vaccination is covered at no cost.

If you have private insurance, contact your health insurance carrier to determine your coverage:

- **If covered**, you can submit expenses to your plan for reimbursement. (Note: if Cornell Health provides the vaccine, charges will go on your Bursar bill unless otherwise requested.)
- **If not covered**, the local health department (Tompkins County Whole Health) will cover the cost of your vaccination. They can be reached at 607-274-6688.

For more information

Visit [cdc.gov/rabies](https://www.cdc.gov/rabies).

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