



## **ALERT FOR CLINICIANS**

### **Rabies risk expanded to island of Timor**

#### **KEY POINTS**

- Recent detections of terrestrial rabies with associated human mortalities have occurred on the island of Timor, including the Indonesian Province of Nusa Tenggara Timur (West Timor) and Timor-Leste.
- Pre-exposure vaccination and post exposure prophylaxis should be considered for people who work in or travel to Nusa Tenggara Timur or Timor-Leste.
- Post-exposure prophylaxis including rabies vaccine and human rabies immunoglobulin (HRIG) is funded by WA Health for rabies exposures overseas, or to bat lyssaviruses overseas or within Australia.
- Contact [public health](#) for advice and access to rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (vaccine and HRIG).

#### **Background**

- Rabies is caused by exposure to saliva or neural tissue from an animal infected with rabies virus or other lyssaviruses.
- People may be exposed to rabies and other lyssaviruses through animal scratches or bites, or by direct contact of mucosal surfaces with infected saliva.
- The incubation period for human rabies disease can be several days to years.
- Rabies is invariably fatal. Symptoms include headache, fever, fatigue and sensory changes around the wound site, before progressing to paralysis, agitation, hydrophobia, delirium, seizures or coma.

#### **Epidemiology**

- Common exposures are from terrestrial mammals (e.g. dogs, cats or monkeys) and bats across Asia (including Bali, Indonesia), Africa and South America.
- Australian bat lyssavirus infection has been identified in Australian bats and flying foxes.
- In addition to the countries listed in Public Health England's [list of terrestrial rabies risk by country](#), the Indonesian Province of Nusa Tenggara Timur (West Timor) and Timor-Leste is now considered a rabies risk.

#### **Pre-exposure prevention**

- Advise patients to avoid contact with wild or domestic mammals in countries with a rabies risk, including bats in Australia or overseas.
- Recommend rabies vaccine for: people who come into direct contact with bats in Australia or overseas; research laboratory workers working with live lyssavirus; and people who will be travelling to, or living in, countries where there is a rabies risk (if indicated following a risk assessment).

#### **Post-exposure management**

- Prompt [wound cleansing](#) is vital following possible exposure to rabies or other lyssavirus.
- Obtain details about the incident (including date, animal, country, wound), any vaccine or immunoglobulin already given, and the patient's weight, allergies and medical conditions.
- Contact [public health](#) for advice and access to rabies post-exposure prophylaxis. Health providers do not need to write a script or use private stock.
- Further information is available in the [Australian Immunisation Handbook](#).

#### **Contacting public health**

- Phone your local [Public Health Unit](#) during office hours (8am-5pm Mon-Fri, excluding public holidays) or after hours call 08 9328 0553.
- Suspected or confirmed cases of rabies must be notified **urgently** by telephone.
- See [Rabies and other lyssaviruses \(including Australian bat lyssavirus\)](#) for further information.

**Dr Paul Armstrong**

DIRECTOR, COMMUNICABLE DISEASE CONTROL DIRECTORATE

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