IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT PRE-EXPOSURE RABIES VACCINATION

Please read carefully and complete this form before beginning pre-exposure rabies immunization. If you do not understand this material or have questions, be sure to ask your health care provider.

What is rabies?

Rabies is a viral disease of mammals that attacks the nervous system. Humans are exposed to rabies from the bite of an infected animal or by its saliva coming into contact with an open wound or mucous membranes (such as, the lining of the eye, nose or mouth). Once the symptoms of rabies develop (usually 3 - 8 weeks after an exposure), no treatment can prevent the death of the patient. In Maryland, the animals most likely to get rabies are raccoons, cats, bats, skunks, foxes, groundhogs, horses, cattle, and dogs. However, the possibility of rabies exposure must be considered each time a person is bitten by any mammal, either wild or domestic.

What is pre-exposure (Pre-E) rabies vaccination?

Pre-exposure rabies vaccination is a way to protect a person from getting rabies before they come in contact with a rabid animal. Two types of rabies vaccines are licensed for pre-exposure in the US; both are equally safe and produce an antibody response against rabies virus. The available vaccines are as follows: Human Diploid Cell Vaccine (HDCV), and Purified Chick Embryo Cell vaccine (PCEC). Rabies Vaccine Absorbed (RVA) is no longer available in the United States.

What are the advantages of preexposure vaccination?

Although Pre-E does not eliminate the need for additional treatment once you are exposed to a rabid animal, it does reduce the number of doses needed for treatment. If an individual with a history of receiving Pre-E is exposed to a rabid animal, only 2 doses of rabies vaccine are necessary instead of 5 doses of vaccine plus antirabies serum (Human Rabies Immune Globulin).

THE FIRST LEVEL OF PREVENTION IS TO **AVOID** RABIES EXPOSURE.
Pre-exposure vaccination is the second level of prevention.

Who should consider receiving Pre-E?

A person whose work, interests, or hobbies that may bring them in regular and close contact with animals capable of having rabies should consider pre-E. Pre-E is generally recommended for groups such as veterinarians, laboratory workers, animal handlers, animal control personnel, wildlife workers, trappers, and raccoon hunters. People who will not have ready access to medical care, those backpacking to a remote area, persons on more than 30 days international travel, or families in a foreign country where rabies is a problem, should also consider pre-E.

How many shots in a Pre-E series?

The pre-exposure vaccination series consists of three injections (shots) of a killed rabies virus vaccine. The first two doses are given one week apart (day 0 and 7). The third and last dose is given 2-3 weeks following the second dose (day 21 or 28). Adults and children receive the same dose and schedule for vaccination.

What way is the vaccine given?

All pre-E rabies vaccinations are administered in the muscle of the upper arm (deltoid) in adults; in children less than 5 years in the upper mid thigh (vastis lateralis). Rabies vaccines should NEVER be given in the buttock (gluteus) areas.

Are booster doses of the vaccine needed?

Either a blood test (titer) or a booster dose of rabies vaccine is recommended every 2 years. A titer shows that antibodies to the rabies virus are present and at a certain level the need for the booster is not necessary. If the titer is low or negative, a booster dose is necessary.

Could there be undesirable effects from the rabies vaccines?

The current rabies vaccines have been used in the U.S. since 1980 and are considered safe and effective. Approximately 16,000 – 39,000 people receive these vaccines each year. Minor local reactions, such as pain, itching, swelling, and redness at the site of the injection (shot) may occur within 24-48 hours. These reactions are usually gone in several days. A few individuals (around 6 out of 100) may experience one or more allergic symptoms, such as itching rash, fever, joint pain, swelling nausea, vomiting and shortness of breath. These symptoms may occur up to 21 days (though usually within 12 days) following the injections. Most indivduals recover rapidly following treatment; to date nobody has died or has been permanently affected following such a reaction.

What health conditions may affect getting Pre-E rabies vaccination?

GENERAL - If you are sick, been exposed to an infectious disease, or are getting well from an illness the vaccine should be postponed. Tell the health care provider if you have had reactions to a previous dose of a rabies vaccine.

PREGNANCY - Pregnant women may receive pre-exposure vaccination if there are valid reasons to do so. Ask your health care provider, if needed.

ALLERGIES (hypersensitivity) - Persons having a history of hypersensitivity (allergy) to any vaccine or other substances such as foods, drugs and antibiotics should obtain permission from their health care provider before beginning pre-exposure vaccination.

IMMUNOSUPPRESSED Individuals – Pre-exposure immunization for immunosuppressed persons is not recommended. Persons, who have or have had cancer or are taking corticosteriods or, other immunosuppressive drugs should obtain permission from their health care provider before receiving pre-exposure vaccinations.

ANTIMALARIAL DRUGS – May affect the vaccination response. Please tell the health care provider if you are taking anti-malarial drugs.

QUESTIONS - If you have any questions about Pre-E rabies vaccination, please ask us now or call your health care provider before you sign this form.

REACTIONS - If you have any serious reaction in the 4 weeks following vaccination, contact your health care provider and report these reactions to the local health department.