May is Rabies Awareness Month

Rabies awareness month is May; the Durham Region Health Department (DRHD) is reminding health care providers of their requirement under Ontario Regulation 557 of the Health Protection and Promotion Act to notify their local public health unit of any person who has had a suspected rabies exposure. This notification should occur as soon as possible. In 2018, DRHD investigated over 1,200 animal bite reports and issued over 120 rabies post-exposure treatments.

Only mammals can carry rabies. In Canada, the animals most often proven rabid are wild terrestrial carnivores (e.g., skunks, foxes and raccoons), bats, cattle and stray dogs and cats. Rabies is transmitted to a human when the virus is introduced into a bite wound, open cuts in skin or onto mucous membranes such as the mouth or eyes which warrants rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP). The objective of PEP is to neutralize the rabies virus at the site of infection before the virus can enter the central nervous system; hence PEP should be started as soon as possible after the exposure and in accordance with the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care “Management of Potential Rabies Exposures Guideline, 2019 “(February 2019).

PEP of previously unimmunized persons consists of administration of both Rabies Immune Globulin (Rab Ig) and rabies vaccine.

a) The Rab Ig recommended dose is 20 IU/kg based upon the body weight of the person and the entire dose should be administered on the first day of initiation of therapy, Day 0. If possible, the full dose of Rab Ig should be thoroughly infiltrated into the wound(s) and surrounding area(s).

b) The rabies vaccine should be administered IM at a different anatomical site distant from where the Rab Ig was administered on Day 0, and a separate syringe should be used. In general, the rabies vaccine is administered into the deltoid muscle in older children and adults but never in the gluteal region. The rabies vaccine for an immunocompetent person consists of four 1.0 mL doses of HDCV or PCECV, and a single dose should be administered on Days 0, 3, 7 and 14. Please see references for more information on infants, schedule & dosing for immunocompromised persons and previously immunized individuals.

Health care providers are to report animal bites and, where recommended, to order PEP for their patients, by contacting DRHD at 1-888-777-9613. Reports can also be submitted electronically by visiting durham.ca – Health and Wellness – Public Health Inspections and Investigations – Rabies.

Health care provider resources now available to order online durham.ca/HCP.

Durham Region Health Department: 905-723-3818, 1-888-777-9613

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If you prefer to receive this information in an electronic format please submit your request to healthresources@durham.ca

If you require this information in an accessible format, contact 1-888-777-9613.