

Rabies: Primary Management and Referral Services

Primary Management of Rabies (at Primary Health Care Level)

- Primary management focuses on **immediate life-saving measures** after an animal bite to prevent rabies infection.

A. Immediate Wound Management (Most Important Step)

- **Wash the wound immediately** for at least **15 minutes** with: Soap and running water
- **Apply antiseptics:**
 - Povidone-iodine / iodine / alcohol (70%)
- **Do NOT** Suture the wound immediately (unless necessary), do not apply irritants like chili, lime, turmeric, or oils, Bandage tightly

B. Assessment of Exposure (WHO Categories)

- **Category I:** Touching/feeding animals, licks on intact skin
→ No treatment
- **Category II:** Nibbling of uncovered skin, minor scratches without bleeding
→ Rabies vaccine
- **Category III:** Single/multiple bites, scratches with bleeding, licks on broken skin, exposure to bats
→ Rabies vaccine + **Rabies Immunoglobulin (RIG)**

C. Active Immunization (Anti-Rabies Vaccine – ARV)

- Start **immediately** after exposure
- Given by **IM or ID route** as per national guidelines
- Complete full course (e.g., days 0, 3, 7, 14, 28)

D. Passive Immunization (Rabies Immunoglobulin – RIG)

- Indicated for **Category III** exposures
- Types:
 - Human RIG (HRIG)
 - Equine RIG (ERIG)
- Infiltrate as much as possible **around the wound**, remainder IM at a different site from vaccine

E. Supportive Care

- Tetanus toxoid if required
- Antibiotics for infected wounds
- Pain management
- Counseling on completing vaccine schedule

2. Referral Services for Rabies

- Referral is essential when services are not available at the primary level or in severe cases.
- **Indications for Referral**
- Category III exposure when **RIG is not available**
- Severe, multiple, or deep wounds
- Bites on **head, face, neck, hands, or genitals**
- Delayed presentation (>24–48 hours)
- Immunocompromised patients
- Suspected or confirmed rabies symptoms

Health Education & Community Role

- Educate about early reporting after animal bites
- Promote dog vaccination and population control
- Encourage completion of full PEP schedule
- Discourage harmful traditional practices