

## Public Health Wales Briefing: Counterfeit Rabies Vaccine in India

**Date of briefing: 30-Oct-2025**

**Intended audience:**

- *Welsh Government*
- *PHW Health Protection Teams and Infection Service*
- *Health Board DsPH, Immunisation Co-ordinators and Health Protection Leads*

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### 1 Background

Rabies is a serious viral zoonotic disease caused by members of the lyssavirus genus. Transmission is through infected saliva via bites or scratches from infect animals, in particular dogs. The incubation period is generally 3-12 weeks but may range from 4 days to 19 years. In >93% of patients, onset is within 1 year of exposure. Once symptoms develop, it is almost always fatal and there is no effective treatment.

The UK has been rabies-free since 1922, but rabies is still a significant public health problem in many countries in Asia and Africa.

Post-exposure treatment and vaccination is very effective in preventing infection on those who have been exposed, provided it is given in a timely way. Individuals with confirmed exposure in countries where there is a risk of rabies should begin a rabies vaccination course immediately after exposure. The number of doses required depends on risk assessment of exposure and prior vaccination history for rabies but typically involves a course of four doses given over 21 days. Those with higher-risk wounds also require Human Rabies Immunoglobulin. Immunosuppressed individuals may require a slightly different course of treatment.

In India, rabies is endemic in animals, especially dogs. On 24<sup>th</sup> September 2025, the UK Health Security Agency was informed of reports of a counterfeit rabies vaccine circulating in India, limited to one brand of vaccine called Abhayrab. This vaccine brand is not available in the UK.

People who have received one or more doses of a counterfeit vaccine after exposure may not be fully protected against rabies.

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### 2 Main information

- Only India currently appears to be affected by the counterfeit vaccine and only patients who received the Abhayrab brand of rabies vaccine are affected.
- The first report of counterfeit vaccine is thought to have been in January 2025.
- According to batch number comparison, from information as at 24 Oct, the earliest likely use of the counterfeit vaccine was thought to be in July 2024 and may still be in circulation. However, on 27 Oct PHW was informed by UKHSA that it is now thought to be earlier still (Nov 2023).

- The geographic extent of circulation is unknown, but as of 16<sup>th</sup> October 2025 has been detected in Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad and Lucknow.
- The composition, market volume (and hence population affected) and adverse event profile of the counterfeit vaccine are also unknown.

#### Case definition for those affected:

- **Affected group:** People who have received rabies vaccine as part of a post-exposure treatment (PET) course in India, **where** the brand was confirmed to be Abhayrab (or unknown), **AND** who have received fewer than 3 vaccines in the UK\* as part of their PET course if non-immune, or fewer than 2 vaccines in the UK if fully immune prior to the exposure, **during the designated timeframe.**

\* or other location without concerns of counterfeit vaccine

- **Timeframe:** The current timeframe for this incident is from 1 November 2023, continuing prospectively up to an end point to be agreed.

#### Identification of affected people

Public Health Wales is conducting a retrospective lookback to ensure those affected by this incident are offered appropriate risk assessment and revaccination if indicated.

Some people with relevant exposures may have been vaccinated with the counterfeit vaccine product and may not be adequately protected. Although the risk of rabies is low, due to the extremely high case-fatality for rabies infection, those receiving the counterfeit vaccine should be identified, risk assessed and offered revaccination where appropriate.

We have reviewed health protection and virology data over the from 1 March 2024 to October 2025 (following the initial timeframe agreed), and have identified fewer than 10 people across Wales meeting the affected person definition (as of 16 October 2025).

Following risk assessment, from 28 Oct we are contacting affected individuals and their GPs to agree revaccination as appropriate. We have already informed the Directors of Public Health in each of the health boards where affected individuals reside. Over the coming week we will extend the review and associated actions to the period from 1 November 2023 to March 2024, covering the remaining timeframe.

We have also updated our acute service and on-call guidance to identify affected individuals in the future.

This briefing is to inform stakeholders of the situation, and of the actions and recommendations arising from the review.

### 3 **Actions:**

- From Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> October, Public Health Wales will be contacting the GPs of patients who meet the affected person case definition across Wales to request the revaccination of individuals.
  - Public Health Wales will be contacting all identified affected patients from Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> October to alert them to the issue, provide reassurance and facilitate revaccination with their GP.
  - Public Health Wales will contact Directors of Public Health and Immunisation Coordinators in health boards where patients meeting the affected person case definition reside for information.
  - Clinicians should be aware of the look back and follow advice should they be informed that one of their patients is affected
  - Guidance will be reinforced by publication of a news item on the TravelHealthPro (NaTHNaC) website.
  - Health Protection Teams will facilitate the assessment and revaccination of affected individuals.
  - Health boards should be aware of this review and whether they have any affected individuals in their population.
  - Infection services should be aware of this review and contribute to the risk assessment and facilitation of revaccination.
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### 4 **References/Sources of information**

NaTHNaC news story on this issue: [NaTHNaC - Falsified Rabies Vaccine: India](#)

[UK Health Security Agency: Rabies information leaflet for travellers](#)

[UKHSA: Rabies post exposure treatment: management guidelines](#)

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