

c Equine rabies immunoglobulin (ERIG) soon to be available in South Africa

As reported in the Communiqué, April 2016, there is a national shortage of the human rabies immunoglobulin (HRIG) presently being used in the country. The sole supplier of HRIG, the National Bioproducts Institute, has indicated that there will not be any available stock for the period May 2016 to August 2016. The South African National Department of Health is in the process of procuring equine rabies immunoglobulin (ERIG) under Section 21 legislation, as this product is not registered in South Africa. It will take three to six weeks for ERIG to be procured.

ERIG has been widely used for post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) over many decades in countries with high rates of canine rabies and has been found to be safe and effective. However, compared with HRIG, the use of ERIG does carry a low risk (1 in 150,000 doses administered) of adverse drug reaction, specifically anaphylaxis. **Therefore, ERIG should only be administered in facilities that are equipped to respond appropriately to anaphylactic shock.** ERIG also has a different dosing schedule to HRIG. **The dose of ERIG is twice as high (40 IU/Kg of body weight) as the dose needed for HRIG (20 IU/Kg of body weight).**

All patients who are exposed to a suspected rabid animal should be managed according to current national guidelines for post-exposure prophylaxis. This must include wound management and PEP.

PEP includes rabies vaccine with or without rabies immunoglobulin (RIG). The indications for administration of ERIG remain unchanged. As with HRIG, ERIG MUST BE ADMINISTERED in category III wounds. **The vaccine, its schedule and dosing, remains unchanged.** For further information regarding risk assessment, please consult the national rabies guidelines; link provided below.

Training will be done before introduction of ERIG at healthcare facilities in South Africa. Training will include indication for ERIG, administration and dosage, adverse effects and management of these, reporting of adverse effects and referral systems where ERIG is not available. The National Department of Health will issue appropriate communications in the coming weeks. For additional information or rabies-related advice, contact the NICD hotline on 082 883 9920.

Link to the national rabies guideline: http://www.nicd.ac.za/assets/files/B5_rabies_revised_2010%282%29.pdf

Source: Division of Public Health, Surveillance and Response, NICD-NHLS; Centre for Emerging and Zoonotic Diseases, NICD-NHLS