

Bat Conservation Trust



28 February 2023

To whom it may concern,

Advice on free vaccinations for bat volunteers

A small number of bats in the UK carry rabies viruses called European Bat Lyssaviruses (EBLV). There are two types, EBLV-1 and EBLV-2. Classical rabies virus (usually found in terrestrial mammals including dogs) has never been found in bats in the UK or the rest of Europe. The risk of EBLV infection to humans is thought to be low, however the Bat Conservation Trust works to raise awareness and manage the potential risk.

Since the death of an unvaccinated bat handler in Scotland in 2002, it has been agreed that all individuals working with and handling bats in the UK should be vaccinated against rabies, and furthermore that these vaccinations should be offered free of charge to those doing this work regularly in a voluntary capacity.

Please note that people who work with bats as part of their paid jobs (such as ecological consultants) are **not eligible** for free rabies vaccinations, even if they also do voluntary bat work, and these vaccinations must be paid for by the employer. Additionally, people who only intend to work with bats outside the UK must get their vaccinations privately.

People who have severely impaired immune systems due to certain medications may not respond fully to treatment with rabies vaccine following a bat bite and, as EBLV infections are fatal in humans, it may not be possible to treat them effectively. In these cases, careful counselling is essential to ensure the person is made aware of the potential risks before handling bats. Further details about who would be considered to be immunosuppressed and what they should do next is available in [chapter 6 of the Green Book](#).

Further information about rabies vaccinations in general is available in [chapter 27 of the Green Book](#).

England

In England, rabies vaccinations for volunteer bat handlers are included in the Vaccinations and Immunisations Additional Service of the GP contract. The pre-exposure vaccine is provided by UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA)'s Rabies and Immunoglobulin Service (RIGS) on behalf of the Department of Health and can be obtained by GPs free of charge. The RIGS guidelines for GPs and other medical professionals on the process for requesting pre-exposure vaccinations can be found online at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rabies-pre-exposure-prophylaxis-guidelines>.

Requests for advice should also be directed to this service (call: 0330 128 1020 or email: lg.clerks@nhs.net).

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Please note that although the vaccine and subsequent boosters can be obtained free of charge for volunteers who regularly handle bats, [serology tests](#) are not currently free and must be paid for by the patient.

Wales

BCT's rabies documentation is currently available in English only. Currently the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) supply free rabies vaccines for volunteers in Wales as well as in England. The pre-exposure vaccine is provided by UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA)'s Rabies and Immunoglobulin Service (RIGS) on behalf of the Department of Health and can be obtained by GPs free of charge. The RIGS guidelines for GPs and other medical professionals on the process for requesting pre-exposure vaccinations can be found online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rabies-pre-exposure-prophylaxis-guidelines>. Requests for advice should also be directed to this service (call: 0330 128 1020 or email: lg.clerks@nhs.net).

For further information, please see Welsh Health Circular (2018) 048 at: <https://gov.wales/eligibility-non-routine-immunisations-whc2018048>.

Please note that although the vaccine and subsequent boosters can be obtained free of charge for volunteers, [serology tests](#) are not currently free and must be paid for by the patient.

Scotland

The pre-exposure rabies vaccine and [serology tests](#) should be available to volunteers, resident in Scotland, free of charge from the NHS. Individuals should approach their GP practice for vaccination.

Further information is available in the document “**Rabies: Guidance on prophylaxis and management in humans in Scotland**” which can be downloaded from the Health Protection Scotland website <http://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/> (note this document is in the process of being updated so may not be available).

Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, the vaccine is available free of charge for licensed non-occupational bat handlers via their GP using an HS21 prescription.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Yours faithfully,



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Please note that a newer version of this document may be available at <https://www.bats.org.uk/about-bats/bats-and-disease/bats-and-disease-in-the-uk/rabies-vaccine>