

16th March, 2016

Provincial Directors of Health Services,
Deputy Provincial Director of Health Services,
All Heads of Decentralized Units,
Directors of Teaching Hospitals,
All MSS/DMOs/MOICs,
All Heads of Institutions.

GUIDELINES TO BE FOLLOWED IN A CASE OF HUMAN RABIES/ DEATH AND DISPOSAL OF THE BODY

Human to human transmission of rabies has not been reported even though there is a theoretical possibility for such transmission. Duration of virus survival in a dead body is unknown, but most likely may be for a few hours. However, it is necessary to take all precautions when handling a dead body due to the risk of contamination with infected material, such as brain and saliva.

- When a rabies suspected patient is admitted to a medical institution, the Department of Rabies, MRI should be contacted before sending specimens for anti-mortem diagnosis.

Please follow the instructions given below in a case of death due to human rabies and disposal of the body.

Death occurring in a medical Institution

1. Human rabies is a notifiable disease in Sri Lanka and therefore all cases should be notified immediately to the relevant medical officer of health (MOH).
2. An inquest and a post-mortem is essential in all suspected cases of human rabies in order to confirm by laboratory diagnosis. A specimen of the whole brain without any preservatives should be sent to the Medical Research Institute (MRI) with a clinical history of the patient. The specimen should be transported in a leak proof container packed in ice. Blood or cerebrospinal fluid collected at post-mortem are not suitable specimens and should not be sent to MRI for rabies diagnosis.
3. All staff handling the dead body and the soiled linen should wear gloves. In addition the use of standard precautions are recommended to be adopted during a post-mortem, by wearing masks, gloves, boots, an apron and preferably goggles.
4. The body should be handed over to the relatives without any delay.

Death occurring outside a medical institution

1. Notify the case to the relevant medical officer of health (MOH) and the range public health inspector (PHI) immediately.
2. Medical officer certifying the death should inform the coroner and request for a post-mortem.

The general measures to be followed:

1. The body should not be handled unnecessarily. Inform the relatives to dispose the body (preferably by cremation) as early as possible.
2. Embalming of body is not recommended. However, if it is essential, the undertaker should be advised to wear protective clothing, mask, gloves and boots during preparation of the body to prevent contamination.
3. Sealing the coffin is not required.
4. A closed coffin should be encouraged to prevent relatives from embracing or hugging the body.
5. Any place or item which is contaminated with body secretions, should be disinfected with freshly prepared 10% Sodium Hypochlorite solution.
6. The patient's clothing, bed linen and other personal items should be boiled and washed with soap & water before reuse.
7. Post exposure treatment (PET) is recommended only for the bystander(s) who nursed the patient and those who had sexual contact with the deceased within 14 days prior to the onset of clinical signs and symptoms
8. No PET is required for ward and judicial medical officer's staff and unnecessary PET should always be avoided. However, specialized advice could be sought for any accidental exposure to body secretions.

(Please follow the instructions given on rabies PET in protocol for anti rabies post exposure therapy - circular No 2016-127(MRI-ARPET))

Any clarification could be obtained from the Consultant Virologist, Dept of Rabies, Medical Research Institute, Colombo 08. (Tel: 011-2693532-4, 011-2698660) or Epidemiologist, Epidemiology Unit, 231, De Saram Place, Colombo 10. (Tel: 011-2695112, 2681548)



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