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Re: Rabies Immunization

Rabies remains an international health concern. Although the number of US travelers each year succumbing to rabies is very low (less than one per year), it remains a serious threat, as there is no effective treatment, outside of immunization.

Currently, there are several available vaccines effective to prevent rabies, including vaccines derived from human diploid cells, duck embryo cells and other sources. These are **all** effective in preventing rabies. However, if an individual is exposed to rabies, and is not previously immunized with one of the above vaccines, then the current recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are to use Rabies Immune Globulin (RIG) in combination with any of the vaccines. Unfortunately, there is currently a worldwide shortage of RIG, and it cannot currently be obtained in some developing countries, including some AMIGOS countries.

There are several strategies available to prepare for this situation:

1. Immunization prior to departure to Latin America. Three doses of rabies vaccine prior to exposure to rabies will obviate the need for rabies immune globulin. While the volunteer will still need further immunization if exposed to rabies, RIG is not needed, and the required vaccines are readily available in our Amigos countries.
2. For volunteers not already immunized prior to exposure to rabies, our only options are to get RIG to the volunteer, or get the volunteer to RIG. AMIGOS is currently identifying sources of RIG in some of our host countries. If not RIG is not available, or shippable, then we may need to move the volunteer to another country in Latin America where RIG can be obtained, or possibly return the volunteer to the US if RIG cannot be obtained.

We have added rabies immunization as an “Optional” vaccination for all volunteers because of the shortage of RIG.

As those of you have been associated with AMIGOS for many years well know, the safety of our volunteers is the most important aspect of our field programs. We will continue to monitor this situation very closely, and will inform all involved if there are any important new developments.