



**Issue date**  
**28 March 2024**

**Distributed to:**

Chief Executives  
Directors of Clinical Governance  
Director, Regulation and Compliance Unit

**Action required by:**

Chief Executives  
Directors of Clinical Governance

**We recommend you also inform:**

Directors, Managers and Staff of:

- Emergency Departments
- Infectious Diseases
- Public Health
- Nursing

Drug and Therapeutics Committees

**Deadline for completion of action – ASAP**

**Expert Reference Group**

**Content informed by:**  
Health Protection NSW

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**Review date**  
**March 2025**

## Clinician Alert – Rabies Risk for Timor-Leste

### Situation

Timor-Leste is now considered a high-risk country for rabies virus following a detection of rabies virus for the first time. Timor-Leste has previously been considered rabies-free. There have also been recent detections and human cases in West Timor, Indonesia. Recommendations for rabies Pre- and Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP and PEP) should align with those for other rabies enzootic countries.

### Background

Rabies is a viral disease that is almost always fatal once symptoms appear. It is primarily transmitted to humans through the bites, scratches, or saliva of infected animals. Rabies is preventable through timely and appropriate pre- or post-exposure prophylaxis. Until this development, Timor-Leste was not considered a rabies enzootic country. Although rabies has only been detected in the Oecusse region of Timor-Leste at this time, all of Timor-Leste should now be considered high-risk for rabies given the potential for transmission on the island. This is especially urgent for any returning travellers who have had a potential exposure to the virus in Timor-Leste.

### Assessment

Rabies is almost always fatal once symptoms appear. Clinicians should be vigilant in identifying patients who may be, or have been exposed, to rabies in all countries including Timor-Leste to ensure appropriate PrEP or PEP is administered.

### Clinical Recommendations for travellers to Timor-Leste:

People traveling to Timor-Leste (or any other high-risk rabies country) should be advised to discuss rabies prevention with their primary care provider or a travel health clinic.

### Clinical recommendations for travellers from Timor-Leste:

Any traveller returning from Timor-Leste (or any other high-risk rabies country) who was bitten or scratched by an animal or had saliva contact from an animal should have appropriate wound care and be assessed for PEP.

1. **Wound Management:** Advise patients on the importance of thorough initial wound cleaning with soap and water emphasising that this should have been done as soon as possible after the exposure. If this initial step was missed, consider cleaning the wound again prior to initiating PEP.
2. **Consideration for PEP:** Contact the Public Health Unit on 1300 066 055 to support assessment of any patient reporting a bite, scratch, or contact with the saliva of an animal in Timor-Leste.
3. **PEP Administration:** Following PHU advice and assessment, administer PEP (including Rabies Immunoglobulin and/or vaccines) as per the Australian Immunisation Handbook.

### Further information

Australian Immunisation Handbook

<https://immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au/contents/vaccine-preventable-diseases/rabies-and-other-lyssaviruses>

NSW Health Control Guidelines

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/controlguideline/Pages/rabies.aspx>

Smart Traveller Website

<https://www.smartraveller.gov.au/destinations/asia/timor-leste>



## Safety Alert 005/24

### Required actions for the Local Health Districts/Networks

1. Immediately upon receipt, distribute this Safety Alert to all relevant clinicians and clinical departments.
2. Include this Safety Alert in relevant handovers and safety huddles.
3. Acknowledge receipt and distribution of this Safety Alert within 72 hours to:  
[CEC-MedicationSafety@health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:CEC-MedicationSafety@health.nsw.gov.au)