Why does the Purdue College of Veterinary Medicine require the pre-exposure rabies immunization for first year students?

The Center for Disease Control recommends the vaccinations for all veterinary workers. Since you will have significant animal contact even in your first year, the vaccinations are required for first year students.

Should I get the rabies vaccinations from my personal physician or wait until I arrive at Purdue?

Some insurance companies require patients to get vaccinations within their networks. However, many physicians cannot order the vaccinations for their patients. If you cannot get the vaccinations through your personal physician, you will be able to get these vaccinations at Purdue through Purdue University Student Health (PUSH) when school begins. Please be aware that PUSH is out of network for Anthem BCBS and most major health insurance carriers. You can address questions regarding insurance with personnel at PUSH by calling 765-494-1700. If you are able to get the vaccinations through your physician, be sure to start the vaccination series by at least early July because they are given in a series of 3 inoculations over 3-4 weeks.

Which rabies vaccines are approved in the US?

The CDC (Center for Disease Control) in the US recommends intramuscular injections of three doses of either human diploid cell rabies vaccine (HDCV- brand name Imovax Rabies, produced by Sanofi Pasteur) or purified chick embryo cell vaccine (PCECV- brand name RabAvert, produced by Novartis).

I have heard of the intradermal rabies vaccine method, which is a lot cheaper. Why isn’t that vaccine route available at PUSH (Purdue University Student Health)?

The Purdue College of Veterinary Medicine health policy recommends the rabies vaccination series options which are approved by the CDC here in the US. The intradermal route is not approved here in the US due to past cases of this immunization method resulting in inadequate immunity, rabies infection, and death.

Here is a link to information relating to this issue from the CDC Yellow Book, the definitive text on infectious disease policy in the US:

How will the vaccination program available through the Purdue College of Veterinary Medicine work?

At orientation, you will be able to sign up for the vaccination program. Nurses from PUSH will come to the vet school on three Wednesday mornings to administer the vaccinations. You will not have to arrange these vaccinations on your own at PUSH. However, if necessary, you can arrange the vaccinations at PUSH by calling 765-494-1700.

What if I have already been immunized for rabies? Do I need a booster or a titer?

If you have previously had the pre-exposure or post-exposure rabies immunization series, you need nothing else at this time. In Indiana, routine titers or boosters are not required for most veterinary workers and will not be required while you are a student at Purdue. However, if you work with wildlife, or will leave the state after you graduate, you may need a titer and booster at a later date.

If you think you were vaccinated but aren’t sure, or aren’t confident you received the immunizations at the proper time intervals, a blood test (RFFIT or Rapid Fluorescent Focus Inhibition Test) would be a good option to ensure immunity.
A “positive” result is defined by the ACIP (Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices) as complete neutralization of rabies virus at a serum dilution of 1:5. This result provides minimum evidence of circulating rabies virus neutralizing antibodies. If in this case the RFFIT result is negative, a single booster immunization with rabies vaccine is recommended by the CDC.

Please note that ELISA methods of testing rabies antibodies do not provide evidence for immunity.

RFFIT-methodology rabies immunity testing is available at major laboratories including MidAmerica Clinical Labs and LabCorp. You can schedule a visit with a physician at PUSH or see your personal physician for this blood test. The lab code for this test at MidAmerica Clinical Labs is 5789, and at LabCorp it is 083885 (as of 05/2015).

**What if I have a medical reason to not receive rabies vaccination?**

You and your personal doctor, who knows your medical history best, should discuss the risks and benefits of rabies vaccine for you. If you decide the risks outweigh the benefits, a medical statement from your doctor expressing that fact can serve as a medical contraindication to vaccination. When you are asked to sign the document certifying you are vaccinated, you can simply attach the statement from your doctor showing a medical contraindication.

**Do I need proof of previous vaccinations?**

The College of Veterinary Medicine expects that you will be honest and professional about these requirements. We are only interested in helping you minimize your risk of harm during and after your training.

Purdue University requirements for enrollment do require you to provide actual dates of immunization against measles, mumps, rubella, and tetanus. You will save time if you bring those dates of immunization with you to orientation.

**What if I can’t remember when I last had a tetanus booster?**

Tetanus boosters are given every 5-10 years. It is a good idea to try to find out exactly when you received your last booster in case you should have an injury, such as a dog bite. There is no medical contraindication to receiving another tetanus booster sooner than 5 years after the last immunization. If you are not sure when your last shot was, it may be best to proceed with tetanus immunization now. Purdue University will require you to provide a date of your last shot, or get an updated tetanus immunization.

Both Td (tetanus-diphtheria) and TdaP (tetanus-diphtheria-pertussis) immunizations are acceptable.

**Are there other immunizations I should consider?**

Getting a yearly flu vaccine is the best protection against the typical human influenza viruses that circulate in the winter and early spring. In addition, it can potentially help protect against dual infection with a human and zoonotic influenza virus that could result in a new strain of influenza. Flu vaccination also helps prevent the spread of flu from humans to their animal companions and patients.

**What if I don't have the money for immunizations now?**

The cost of the immunizations administered through PUSH will be billed directly to you (or your insurance company) by Purdue University Student Health. You will be expected to pay these bills in a timely manner, but not necessarily at the time of the vaccination. While the cost of the vaccinations was included in the calculations for your financial aid package, emergency loan funds are available for students who need help in meeting the immunization requirements.
Why does the College require TB testing?

During the course of your veterinary training and practice you are at risk for exposure to Mycobacterium bovis (a mycobacterium that causes bovine tuberculosis, which is transmissible to humans). In a case of possible exposure, you would need skin testing to determine if the disease was transmitted to you. Knowing that your TB test is negative at baseline makes it more likely that a positive test after exposure represents true disease.

The College of Veterinary Medicine requires only a one-step TB skin test, not the two-step as is sometimes used in other human medical settings.

What if my TB test is positive or “indeterminate”? What do I do next?

The next step in this case is to see a doctor and discuss your results and medical history. The doctor may recommend additional testing. You will need a letter of medical clearance to pursue veterinary studies from that doctor to continue your education. In most cases of low risk students, a positive or indeterminate TB test result may indicate latent tuberculosis. Latent tuberculosis is not contagious and would not limit your ability to continue your education. Medical treatment is available to rid your body of the mycobacterium. If you have evidence of active tuberculosis (cough, bloody sputum, fever, weight loss, enlarged lymph nodes, or abnormal chest xray findings), your doctor would recommend medical treatment which may delay your education. Active tuberculosis is contagious to others and should be treated urgently.

What other diseases can veterinarians contract from animals?

Brucellosis, leptospirosis, B virus (a herpes virus infection transmitted from macaques), avian influenza, methicillin-resistant staph aureus, influenza A from swine, psittacosis (lung infection caused by chlamydia species transmitted from birds), and hookworms and ascarids are all examples of infections which can be transmitted to humans from animals.

Are there special risks associated with pregnancy in veterinarians, vet students and vet tech students?

Exposure to anesthetic gases may increase the risk for miscarriage. Pregnancy reduces cell mediated immunity and can increase susceptibility to infectious diseases such as toxoplasmosis, lymphocytic choriomeningitis, brucellosis, listeriosis, and psittacosis. Vertical transmission of some of these infections can result in miscarriage, stillbirth, premature birth, or congenital anomalies. Avoiding exposure to unvaccinated, feral, and parturient (in labor to give birth) animals, and avoiding contact with young animals born apparently dead, can help decrease the risk of zoonotic infection in pregnant students and veterinarians.

A full discussion of safety procedures can be found in the National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians Veterinary Infection Control Committee Report of 2010.


The College of Veterinary Medicine is committed to supporting pregnant students in their academic careers. When pregnancy is identified, students are invited and encouraged to discuss needs for scheduling adjustments with the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and the Director of Student Services.

What if I am immune compromised?

Certain human diseases and treatments, such as HIV or cancer chemotherapy, can cause immune compromise which may put you at higher risk for zoonotic infections. If you are immune compromised, you are also at higher risk for more severe infection and complications from zoonotic infections. Processing lab samples and caring for high-risk animals puts you at increased risk for zoonotic infections. You are encouraged to discuss your specific medical case with your personal
The College of Veterinary Medicine is committed to your academic success, so you are also invited to discuss any academic concerns you may have related to immune deficiency with the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and the Director of Student Services.

Where can I find information about the health requirements of the College of Veterinary Medicine?

The health requirements policy, entitled “Purdue College of Veterinary Medicine Student Health Policy”, can be obtained from the Office of Student Services or accessed online at https://vet.purdue.edu/student-services/handbook/index.php.

Where can I find information about the Purdue University immunization requirements?

Purdue University requires up to date immunizations against measles, mumps, rubella, and tetanus/diphtheria. Tuberculosis testing is also required for international students. You can access the guidelines at http://www.purdue.edu/push/Immunization/.

What if I have additional questions?

You can discuss personal health risks of veterinary education with your personal doctor. You can also contact Julianne Stout MD, Student Health Policy Coordinator for more information. The best method is email at julstout@purdue.edu, or contact her in Lyles-Porter Hall on campus at 765-494-8591.