

EDITORIAL

Dr. Omesh Kumar Bharti

MBBS DHM MAE

State Epidemiologist, State Institute of Health & Family Welfare,
Kasumpti, Shimla, Himachal Pradesh INDIA

Rabies during COVID 19 Pandemic

COVID 19 Pandemic has thrown routine health services out of gear and affected every aspect of healthcare all over the world including rabies control activities. Routine Rabies prophylaxis has been affected due to frequent Lock-Downs and closure of Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) centers for converting them to COVID 19 special hospitals. This has been observed that failure to get (PEP) during covid times has resulted in more deaths due to Rabies than it could have been otherwise. In Himachal we have seen three deaths in last one year due to Rabies and all had not availed PEP due to uncertainty of hospital services availability. People could not get their pets vaccinated due to restrictions during COVID times, even NGOs and municipalities failed to vaccinate stray dogs thereby enhancing the chances of rabies transmission. Routine supply of rabies biological was also affected and many hospitals had shortfall of vaccines or rabies Immunoglobulins that instead contributed to unavailability of rabies prophylaxis to animal bite victims at many hospitals in the country.

A big dilemma came when COVID 19 vaccination started i.e. whether one can get rabies vaccine with or after COVID 19 vaccination. A special task force discussed the issue within APCRI and issued a statement to this effect that rabies vaccination is mandatory to save lives and COVID 19 vaccination is not a contraindication for that. It has been observed clinically that people who were given rabies vaccine even same day to that of COVID 19 vaccine were hale and healthy without any side effects.

Many positives have been witnessed during this pandemic w.r.t Rabies. A COVID 19 vaccine on Rabies vaccine platform is in the pipeline and would help generate antibodies to both COVID as well as Rabies. Some studies are in the pipeline regarding calculation of the RIG volume based on the wound size/area and shall fill the long pending gap in knowledge in this regard globally. Many countries both developed and developing have shifted to new WHO guidelines 2018 saving lives and money as well that also helped in wider availability of rabies biologicals both Vaccines and RIG. New Human monoclonal antibodies as cocktail are under investigation and likely to be available soon. India has shown its leadership quality in all these new initiatives as Indian companies and scientists are involved in all these new positives detailed above.

Now way forward is to reorganize Rabies control activities at all fronts including dog vaccination and sterilization, availability of free PEP to all and rabies/dog bite surveillance. The objective of achieving Human Rabies free world by 2030 should be kept in mind and all efforts should be directed to bridge the gaps so as to make Rabies Free World a reality.

Dr. Omesh Kumar Bharti

Zonal Representative (North), APCRI