

Clinical Picture

Human rabies in monkey (*Macaca mulatta*) bite patients a reality in India now!

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Rabies is a zoonotic disease and an estimated 55 000 people die because of rabies worldwide every year, mostly in Asia and Africa. The recent review on clinical management of monkey bites in travellers¹ and subsequent report of deaths in patients bitten by monkeys² (*Macaca mulatta*) points towards monkeys carrying the rabies virus in rabies endemic countries such as India. We have recently demonstrated rabies virus in a monkey (*M. mulatta*), reported dead in Shimla municipality. The monkey was rabies virus negative with fluorescent antibody technique (FAT) but biological test (BT) positive for rabies virus as done by the Central Research Institute (CRI) Laboratory, Kasauli, Himachal Pradesh. There appears to be frequent

transmission of rabies virus from rabies-carrying stray dogs^{3,4} to even wildlife of all types, especially monkeys that were till date thought to be free of rabies virus. The monkeys are frequently interacting with stray dogs (Figure 1) and probably monkeys and other wildlife animals get infected due to increased interaction with rabies-carrying stray dogs.

Surprisingly, brain samples of some of the other wild animals such as Langoor (*Semnopithecus entellus*) and Himalayan Palm Civet (*Paguma larvata*) were found positive for rabies virus (FAT& BT). Some of the stray dogs that were found recently dead in Shimla municipality were tested for rabies virus with FAT and all were found positive.



Figure 1. Monkey having befriended a stray dog in Bilaspur Town of Himachal Pradesh, India

Even garbage collectors of Shimla municipality who used to carry dead bodies of stray dogs/monkeys for burial were found to have high titers of rabies antibodies in their blood⁵ without any history of rabies prophylaxis.

Travellers need to be cautious when bitten by monkeys in rabies endemic countries such as India and need full rabies post-exposure prophylaxis for protection and better option is, if they had pre-exposure vaccination before travel to rabies endemic countries.

References

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