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Experts back wider access to rabies monoclonal antibodies cocktail

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Despite being preventable, rabies continues to cause a significant burden in India



India's efforts to eliminate dog-mediated human rabies by 2030 could gain further momentum with experts calling for wider access to rabies monoclonal antibodies (RmAbs) alongside faster post-exposure care, better exposure assessment and stronger anti-rabies services.

The call comes as the World Health Organization recognises monoclonal antibodies as an option for passive immunisation when indicated as part of post-exposure prophylaxis, while the 2025 WHO Model List of Essential Medicines includes rabies monoclonal antibodies for rabies post-exposure prophylaxis.

The call was made during a panel discussion titled "Full Stop on Rabies: Advancing Access to Post-Exposure Care for Rabies — Bridging Gaps in Prevention and Treatment", organised by the IHW Council, a public-health advocacy and healthcare ecosystem organisation, and supported by VIRAM: Full Stop on Rabies initiative under the umbrella of Zydus Lifesciences.

The discussion brought together experts in paediatrics, community medicine, emergency medicine and infectious diseases from India and Nepal.

Despite being preventable, rabies continues to cause a significant burden in India, with the latest nationally comparable ICMR-National Institute of Epidemiology assessment estimating 9.1 million animal bites and 5,726 human rabies deaths annually.

The panel highlighted rabies monoclonal antibody cocktails as an alternative to rabies immunoglobulin for passive immunisation, in line with WHO recommendations.

While India has developed and manufactured RmAbs, Nepal has incorporated RmAb cocktails into its national guidelines. Experts called for wider availability beyond tertiary centres and continued healthcare-worker training to strengthen access to appropriate passive immunisation.