

Rabies

A new case of laboratory-confirmed human rabies from Limpopo Province has been reported, bringing the total number of laboratory-confirmed human rabies cases for 2013 in South Africa to four (with KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga and Free State provinces each having reported one case to date).

A nine-year-old child from Elim, Makhado subdistrict, was admitted to hospital in the last week of April. The child presented with symptoms typical of furious rabies, which progressed to coma requiring intensive care with mechanical ventilation. Despite the lack of dog exposure history, rabies was considered as a possible diagnosis due to the clinical presentation and the recent history of rabies in the province. A single ante-mortem saliva specimen was collected and tested positive for the presence of rabies viral RNA by RT-PCR. The patient passed away on 9 May 2013 and a request was made for post-mortem brain specimens to be submitted for confirmation of the diagnosis. Testing of a full repertoire of specimens (i.e. saliva, CSF, nuchal biopsy, ante-mortem brain biopsy, blood/serum) is recommended to investigate rabies infection ante-mortem. Confirmation by direct fluorescent antibody test on post-mortem brain specimens remains the most reliable test for

confirmation or exclusion of infection.

In addition, a clinically suspected case was reported from Limpopo Province during May 2013. The patient, a two-year-old child, died following an acute neurological infection. Keeping in mind that the differential diagnosis of fatal encephalitis is broad, even though the patient's clinical illness was compatible with rabies, in the absence of a history of animal exposure history and specimens for laboratory confirmation of the clinical diagnosis it is not possible to confirm rabies in this case.

An outbreak of rabies affecting dogs is ongoing in Makhado, Limpopo Province. Five confirmed rabid domestic dogs have been reported in the past month. Over the past two months there have been eight incidents involving human exposures to rabid dogs. A dog rabies vaccination campaign is underway in the area.

Source: Centre for Emerging and Zoonotic Diseases and Division of Public Health Surveillance and Response, NICD-NHLS; Limpopo Province Department of Health; Limpopo Province Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries