

## 1 ZOOBOTIC AND VECTOR-BORNE DISEASES

### a Rabies

The National Bioproducts Institute, the sole manufacturer and provider of rabies immunoglobulin (RIG) has informed provincial and national departments of health that RIG (Rabigam®) is currently in critical short supply, and that there will only be limited stocks for the next 4-6 months. Rabigam® is derived from pooled human plasma, sourced from healthy donors with a high titre of antibodies to the rabies virus. A shortfall in the availability of suitable plasma has reduced the quantity of product which could be manufactured. The National Department of Health has issued an advisory for rationalising the use of human RIG. Clinicians are urged to adhere to the current guidelines for administration of rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) and withhold RIG when it is not indicated. Provinces are requested to: 1) identify a rabies expert within the province, to whom all queries regarding the administration of RIG can be directed; 2) enlist the help of provincial pharmacists to monitor stock of RIG within the province on a weekly basis so as to redirect stocks as required. Clinical enquiries regarding administration of RIG can be directed to the NICD Hotline at 082-883-9920.

Thus far in 2016, only a single case of human rabies has been confirmed in South Africa. The case was reported from KwaZulu-Natal Province and involved a 16-year-old boy who was bitten by a domestic cat. The rabies strain was later biotyped as a canid biotype. Although domestic cats may contract and transmit the rabies virus to humans and other mammals, they are not considered a reservoir species of rabies. Since 1983 only ten reported human rabies cases have been associated with exposures to domestic cats. In South Africa, canid biotype rabies virus circulates in domestic dogs, jackals and bat-eared foxes, while viverid biotype circulates in certain species of mongoose. The majority of human cases of rabies are caused by canid biotype rabies virus, and linked with exposure to rabid dogs. Human rabies following exposure to wildlife contacts is very uncommon. Vaccination of domestic dogs and cats is required by law and provides an indirect measure of protecting humans against the disease.

In the last communiqué (February 2016), rabies infection was confirmed in a domestic cat on a plot bordering on the Roodeplaat Dam and Nature Reserve in the City of Tshwane, about 30 km from the centre of the city. Sequencing of the virus confirmed that it is a 'canid' biotype. The source of the rabies infection is unknown but a ring vaccination campaign was conducted in the area, and approximately 350 pets were vaccinated, with the aim of limiting the spread of any undiagnosed rabies in the area.

A concerning exposure to rabies took place in Durban in February 2016 when a family adopted a puppy from the SPCA. Within a few days after adoption, the puppy became very ill and displayed behavioural changes. It was euthanased and subsequently diagnosed with rabies. Unfortunately two family members had been bitten by the puppy. They are currently receiving post-exposure prophylaxis. The person who donated the puppy to the SPCA was traced and assessed for risk of exposure to rabies. Rabies vaccination is licenced for puppies aged 3 months and older, and unfortunately the SPCA had no way of knowing that this puppy was incubating rabies at the time it was adopted.

For more information about rabies and how to prevent the disease in humans please visit [www.nicd.ac.za](http://www.nicd.ac.za)

#### **Erratum: Rabies (February 2016)**

It was incorrectly reported that no human rabies cases were reported for 2016. This information is incorrect as a single case of human rabies was reported from KwaZulu-Natal Province (as mentioned in this edition).

**Source:** Centre for Emerging and Zoonotic Diseases, and Division of Public Health, Surveillance and Response, NICD-NHLS; ([cezd@nicd.ac.za](mailto:cezd@nicd.ac.za)); Onderstepoort Veterinary Institute