

### c Rabies

The NICD has been involved with the laboratory confirmation of human rabies cases since 1981. Human rabies cases are reported annually and for the past ten years an average of five to 15 cases is confirmed per year. For 2014 to date, a total of six rabies deaths in humans was laboratory confirmed, whilst another five deaths are reported as probable rabies cases by the NICD.

The sixth confirmed human rabies case was reported in November 2014. A 10-year-old child from Jixini, in the Umthatha area, Eastern Cape, died on 29<sup>th</sup> of November 2014, the same day of admission to an Eastern Cape hospital, after presenting with a few days history of fever, headache, confusion and hydrophobia. The child was reported to have been bitten by a dog earlier this year. The details about the incident remain unclear. The clinical picture and the history of dog bite raised suspicion of possibility of rabies as the cause of death. Rabies was confirmed on a post-mortem brain specimen submitted to the NICD for testing.

Rabies is a fully preventable disease if post-exposure prophylaxis is provided timely and appropriately to the afflicted person. Too often, a dog bite attack, especially when only minor wounds such as scratches were inflicted, goes untreated and no suspicion of rabies exposure is raised by the victim, often a child, relatives or health personnel. In areas of South Africa with poor awareness and inadequate health facilities, the burden of human rabies continues, and rabies deaths are probably often unaccounted for. The human rabies cases detected at the NICD for the entire country are only the "tip of the iceberg" of this neglected tropical disease.

Further information and tools on clinical management and testing for rabies can be found on [www.nicd.ac.za](http://www.nicd.ac.za). A clinical advice line is provided for health professionals by the NICD (0828839920).

**Source:** Centre for Emerging and Zoonotic Diseases, NICD-NHLS