

### 3 ZONOTIC AND VECTOR-BORNE DISEASES

#### a Rabies

A case of rabies was confirmed in a six-year-old child from Mashamba village, near Elim, in Limpopo Province. Three weeks before falling ill, the child was attacked by a dog and sustained injuries to his head, right hand, right knee and trunk. He presented to a local healthcare facility after the attack; he received a tetanus toxoid booster vaccine, but no consideration was given to the need for rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP). A clinical diagnosis of rabies was made based on the exposure history and typical clinical presentation; signs and symptoms included fever, headache, nausea and vomiting, anxiety and agitation, insomnia, aggressive behaviour, confusion, delirium, and hypersalivation plus hydrophobia. The diagnosis of rabies was confirmed by testing three serial saliva specimens, of which two tested positive by rabies RT-PCR.

This patient represents the third laboratory-confirmed human rabies case from South Africa for 2015 to date. The other cases originated from Polokwane in Limpopo Province and KwaZulu-Natal Province (reported in the April 2015 issue of the Communiqué). In 2014, seven laboratory-confirmed cases were reported in South Africa. The case-patients originated from Eastern

Cape (n=3), North West (n=1) and Limpopo (n=1) provinces, while two confirmed cases were infected in neighbouring countries (Angola and Zimbabwe respectively). A total of five probable cases of human rabies were also recorded in South Africa for 2014, from Mpumalanga (n=2), Limpopo (n=2) and Eastern Cape (n=1) provinces. These cases were classified as probable since they could not be verified by laboratory testing for various reasons, but their clinical presentation and disease course were compatible with rabies and all reported a history of contact with potentially rabid dogs.

Rabies remains a silent killer in Africa, with its true burden greatly underestimated. Rabies, the most fatal disease known to mankind, is preventable by controlling the disease in domestic dogs and by administering rabies PEP in accordance with recognised guidelines. The National Rabies Guidelines and more rabies-related information can be accessed on the NICD website: [www.nicd.ac.za](http://www.nicd.ac.za).

**Source:** Centre for Emerging and Zoonotic Diseases, Division of Public Health, Surveillance and Response, NICD-NHLS