

## b Rabies

Since January 2014, five cases of human rabies have been confirmed. Four infections were acquired after exposure to dogs within South Africa whilst the remaining case involved a man bitten by a dog in Angola (who was evacuated for medical care to a Johannesburg hospital, where he died). There have been no additional laboratory confirmations in the past two months of August and September.

At least 297 cases of dog rabies were reported in South Africa during 2013, with seven laboratory-confirmed fatal human cases recorded for the year. Rabies is endemic throughout South Africa, but most infections have historically been acquired in the provinces bordering the eastern coastline. KwaZulu-Natal (30%) and Mpumalanga (24%) provinces accounted for the highest proportion of dog rabies cases in 2013. Prior to 2013, dog rabies cases from KwaZulu-Natal Province would account for more than half of the animal rabies cases reported nationally per year,<sup>1</sup> but there has been considerable progress in controlling dog rabies in this province over the past 20 months. The last human case reported from KwaZulu-Natal Province was that of a young child from eThekweni municipality near Durban in April 2013. Despite the apparent progress from intensified control efforts that began in 2009, the recognition of at least four human rabies cases in the province in mid-2012 serves as a reminder that sustained high rabies vaccination coverage is essential to avoid resurgence of infections in dogs and consequently in humans. Since 2006, a total of 39 human rabies cases has been reported from Limpopo Province, mostly from the Vhembe district. Other provinces where cases are frequently reported for the same period included KwaZulu-Natal (n=34) and the Eastern Cape (n=29). A total of six human rabies cases has been reported from Mpumalanga Province since 2008. There may be underreporting of human rabies cases from this province since the districts surrounding the Kruger National Park frequently report dog rabies cases. Although rabies can be

acquired anywhere in South Africa, the current areas of concern are Mthatha and Queenstown areas in the Eastern Cape, Vhembe district and Tzaneen surrounds in north-west Limpopo Province, and Bushbuckridge and Mbombela surrounds in Mpumalanga Province. Vigilance must be maintained across KwaZulu-Natal Province, in particular the Durban surrounds (eThekweni), and the previous hotspots in Zululand, Port Shepstone and the provincial border with Eastern Cape Province. An ongoing outbreak of dog rabies in the Rustenburg/Swartruggens areas of North West Province is also concerning.

The National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) serves as the reference laboratory for investigation of suspected human rabies cases and operates a hotline for clinical advice. On 28 September each year, the world unites in the fight against rabies. This year's Rabies Day was themed "*Together Against Rabies*" and celebrated through events in various countries to promote public awareness.

The NICD and Sanofi Pasteur/Merial hosted an event on 30 September to raise awareness for the control and prevention of this incurable disease. Health professionals and members of the public can access more information on rabies through the NICD website.<sup>2</sup>

1. [http://www.nda.agric.za/vetweb/epidemiology/Disease%20Database/OIEData/OIE\\_query\\_Criteria.asp](http://www.nda.agric.za/vetweb/epidemiology/Disease%20Database/OIEData/OIE_query_Criteria.asp)
2. <http://www.nicd.ac.za>

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