

## d A rabies update

The national shortage of rabies immunoglobulin (RIG) has become critical, with stock levels reaching zero in many facilities, particularly in KwaZulu-Natal Province. The National Bioproducts Institute has indicated that limited stocks will become available towards the end of April, but routine supply will only resume in 3-4 months time. The NICD and the Essential Drug committee are in the process of sourcing an international supplier. Most likely an equine RIG will be purchased, as human RIG is prohibitively expensive. Because of a small risk of allergic reaction to the equine product, equine RIG will need to be administered in a hospital or similar health setting. The National Department of Health will issue appropriate communications and provide clear instructions for administration in the coming weeks.

In 2016, to date, a single human death due to rabies has been reported (from KwaZulu-Natal Province, reported in the Communiqué, January 2016). Rabies is controllable and preventable through appropriate post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP). Despite this, rabies deaths continue to occur in South Africa with 8 confirmed, three probable and one suspected case occurring in 2015. A total of 424 human infec-

tions were confirmed in South Africa from 1983 until 2015. Nearly all human rabies cases are associated with injuries sustained by or contact with domestic rabid dogs. Enquiries are regularly received on the NICD (rabies) hotline regarding the need for PEP following bites from a variety of non-canine animals. All bites or scratches or mucous membrane exposures to bats require PEP. Bites from monkeys, rats, or field mice generally do not require PEP. Cane-rats and 'dassies' have been implicated in rabies transmission and exposure to these animals requires a risk assessment.

More information on rabies infection and treatment guidance in South Africa available on [www.nicd.ac.za](http://www.nicd.ac.za). The NICD Hotline for consultation about PEP is 082-883-9920

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