

1 ZONOTIC AND VECTOR-BORNE DISEASES

a Update on rabies in South Africa

The National Institute for Communicable Diseases confirmed the diagnosis of rabies in a six-year-old girl from Clocolan in the eastern Free State Province on 20 July 2016. She presented with symptoms in keeping with rabies and passed away on 19 July at a Bloemfontein hospital. Neither the patient prior to her death, nor her family, reported or recalled exposure to a suspected rabid animal. However, rabies is endemic in South Africa amongst dogs, jackals and mongooses, and can be transmitted from infected animals to humans through minor, seemingly harmless exposures to rabid animals. Scratches to the skin, or licks of mucous membranes such as the eyes or nose, may constitute an exposure. Sequencing of the patient sample identified the rabies virus as canid biotype. It is therefore most likely that the infection was contracted from a rabid dog, cat or other domestic animal. This is the second human case reported for South Africa for 2016 to date. The first case was diagnosed in KwaZulu-Natal Province in January 2016.

A countrywide shortage of human rabies immunoglobulin (or HRIG) has been reported since May 2016. As the shortage is expected to last several months, provision has been made for the emergency importation of equine-derived rabies immunoglobulin (or ERIG) under Section 21

licensing. The indication for the use of ERIG is the same as for HRIG, i.e. category 3 rabies virus exposures. The dosage of ERIG is 40 IU/kg (versus 20 IU/kg for HRIG) and it is important to observe recipients of the product for at least 30 minutes due to very small risk (1 in 150,000 administrations) of anaphylactic shock. More information about ERIG and rabies post-exposure prophylaxis can be obtained from the guidelines section of the NICD website (<http://www.nicd.ac.za/?page=guidelines&id=73>).

Since 16 April to 7 July 2016, rabies has been confirmed in 10 jackals, 4 cattle, 2 dogs and 1 honey badger in Gauteng Province by Gauteng Veterinary Services and Agriculture Research Council - Onderstepoort Veterinary Institute. Although sporadic cases of rabies are reported from Gauteng Province historically, the spike in the jackal cases in the past two months is concerning. Efforts to vaccinate pets in the affected areas have been ongoing and pet owners are reminded that they are responsible to ensure that their cats and dogs are vaccinated for rabies according to the required schedule.

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