agriculture, land reform & rural development
Department:
Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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The Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development celebrates World Rabies Day on 28 September with an ongoing awareness campaign on how the deadly rabies virus can be prevented in humans and animals

The Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) takes this opportunity to alert members of the public on the risks associated with rabies, which is a fatal viral disease that affects all mammals and is transmissible from animals to humans. The virus is transmitted in the saliva of infected animals through bites, scratches, and licks.

Between the start of the year and 31 August, there have been 185 laboratory confirmed animal rabies cases in the country. DALRRD is saddened to report that seven human rabies fatalities (laboratory confirmed) have been reported for 2024, up to 2 September. Three human deaths occurred in KwaZulu-Natal, three in Eastern Cape and one in Limpopo. Although rabies is an unfortunate reality, it is fully preventable.

Dog mediated rabies in humans is fully preventable, and for this reason the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH), the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), have committed to eradicating dog mediated human cases by 2030. South Africa only has six years left to achieve this goal, and it is indeed achievable if we all take the responsibility to have our pets vaccinated.

Breaking rabies boundaries: Celebrating the 18th World Rabies Day in South Africa

World Rabies Day 2024 is celebrated under the theme "***Breaking Boundaries***", to combat

one of the deadliest zoonotic diseases affecting humans and animals alike. Rabies is a viral disease that can infect any mammal, and once symptoms appear, it is 99,9% fatal. It is crucial to be aware of the common signs of rabies, which include changes in behaviour and neurological symptoms. Animals infected with rabies show changes in behaviour and neurological symptoms. These may include an animal drooling more than usual, becoming paralysed, unable to swallow, continuously vocalising (barking, whining, howling, etc.), and becoming aggressive. Additionally, an animal may just appear weak and unresponsive.

Breaking boundaries: Vaccinate pets and save lives

Rabies is endemic in South Africa. According to the Animal Diseases Act, 1984 (Act No. 35 of 1984), every pet owner must have their dogs and cats vaccinated to protect both humans and animals against rabies. The first rabies vaccine is given at 12 weeks (three months) of age, followed by a booster vaccination between one and 12 months later. Thereafter, a booster is required every three years. In high-risk areas, annual vaccination is strongly advised. Enquire with your local state or private veterinarian, animal health technician or welfare organisation.

Breaking boundaries: Together, against rabies—protect your pets and your community

Any mammal can become infected with rabies—this includes pets, wildlife, livestock, and humans. Wildlife species that can also host rabies include jackals, foxes, mongooses, and as recently discovered, seals. Animal rabies occurs in all nine provinces, with dog rabies cycles mainly concentrated in the eastern parts of the country (Limpopo, Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape, and the eastern Free State border with Lesotho). Dogs and cats are often moved between provinces by travellers, workers, or holiday-goers, which can easily cause the spread of rabies to any area if these animals are unvaccinated and incubating the disease. Do not handle or travel with dogs and cats that are not adequately vaccinated against rabies.

If your dogs and cats are vaccinated against rabies, they form a protective barrier for your family and protect you. The same is true if everyone in your community ensures that their dogs and cats are vaccinated. If your vaccinated dog or cat is bitten by a rabid animal, it will not get the disease and cannot pass it on to you.

Breaking boundaries—this advice can save your life

If a person is bitten, scratched, or licked by an animal suspected of having rabies (an unvaccinated animal showing odd behaviour or neurological symptoms), the person needs to wash the wound thoroughly with soap and running water and immediately seek treatment at his/her nearest clinic or hospital to prevent rabies virus infection. The patient might have to return to the clinic several times for treatment. Failure to return for follow-up treatment can result in the treatment not being effective and death may result. Inform the local state or private veterinarian, animal health technician or even the local police so that they may find and remove the rabid animal before it hurts anyone else.

Join the fight against rabies

This World Rabies Day let us talk about the importance of responsible pet ownership, vaccination of dogs and cats, and keeping our communities safe against rabies. Stay informed, stay vigilant, and ensure your pets are vaccinated—because together, we can break boundaries and end rabies.

#BreakingBoundaries #WRD2024 #GlobalAllianceforRabiesControl

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Issued by the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development

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