

Press Release: Minister van Rensburg urges Western Cape farmers to keep up Rift Valley Fever vaccination initiative.

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Illustration: Photo by Wouter Kriel

W-RVF1: "Gerrit van Rensburg, Western Cape Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development vaccinating sheep on Patrysberg outside Vredenburg on the West Coast"

Body: "We are confident that Rift Valley Fever has been contained to the Beaufort West area in our province", Gerrit van Rensburg, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, said on the West Coast today. Van Rensburg helped Mr Kobus Loch, owner of Patrysberg farm, outside Vredenburg, to vaccinate his sheep flock against Rift Valley Fever.

Rift Valley fever must be managed through preventative vaccination, and Van Rensburg urged all livestock farmers to immunise their animals. "I know that winter is coming with cooler weather and a subsequent drop in mosquito activity, but rather be careful than sorry" he said. No cases of Rift Valley Fever have been reported on the West Coast.

Except for the Beaufort West area in the Western Cape, only isolated cases of Rift Valley Fever in animals have been reported in Outhshoorn. "We attribute this to the buffer zone that was created by the Western Cape Department of Agriculture on our Province's northern border". Van Rensburg said. The Department administered 80 000 units of vaccine at a cost of R200 000 during this initiative. But ultimately it is the responsibility of farmers to vaccinate their livestock, Van Rensburg said.

Van Rensburg said that there was no reason for panic, and that the Department of Agriculture is working together with the Department of Health in monitoring this disease in the Western Cape. The Western Cape Department of Health has a contingency plan in place for communicable diseases such as Rift Valley Fever, and Tygerberg Hospital's Infectious Diseases Unit is on standby.

Rift Valley Fever can lead to human fatalities in rare cases. Generally though, human symptoms include mild to moderate flu-like illness. These include fever, headache, general weakness, dizziness, muscle and back pains. Most people recover spontaneously within two days to a week.

There has been only one human case reported in the Western Cape, a state vet from Beaufort West. The incident has subsequently been confirmed as West Nile virus, and not Rift Valley Fever. The official has since fully recovered and is back at work.

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