



RABIES PREVENTION AND CONTROL

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. What is rabies?

Rabies is a disease caused by a virus. It infects the brain and causes confusion, seizures, muscle paralysis and death in 100% of cases.

2. Which animals can have rabies?

In South Africa, rabies is maintained in some populations of domestic dogs, as well as certain species of wildlife in certain areas, including bat-eared foxes, jackals, yellow mongooses and aardwolves. An infected animal can infect another species of animal through a bite, lick or scratch.

3. How do you know if an animal has rabies?

An animal with rabies will often show a sudden, unexplained change in behaviour. Domestic animals can become suddenly aggressive or appear confused, while wild animals lose their fear of people, approaching them and sometimes attacking. Other signs include excess salivation, struggling to swallow, twitching, weakness, fever, vomiting and diarrhoea. Infected animals will die within 2-10 days of first showing signs of disease.

4. Where does Rabies occur in South Africa?

Rabies occurs all over South Africa, but it is maintained in different animal populations in different areas. There are currently domestic dog cycles causing outbreaks in large parts of the Eastern Cape and coastal areas of KwaZulu-Natal. Dog rabies is also present to a lesser degree in some parts of eastern Mpumalanga and Limpopo. In the Western Cape bat-eared foxes are the main host, but we see rabies in other wildlife species from time to time as well. Jackals are the main wildlife host of rabies in the northern parts of South Africa and yellow mongooses in the central parts.

5. How does rabies affect people?

People can be infected with rabies by a rabid animal biting, licking or scratching them. The virus then moves along the nerves to the brain, taking anywhere between a week and a year. Once the virus reaches the brain and begins to replicate, symptoms of the disease start to show and an affected person will die. There is no treatment for rabies, only prevention.

6. How can we prevent rabies?

Rabies is very easy to prevent by vaccinating domestic dogs and cats. Your pet should be vaccinated by a vet when they are three months old, again at a year of age and then every 1-3 years depending on the rabies risk in the area. In humans 99% of rabies cases are caused by rabid dogs, so vaccinating pets is the best way to prevent human rabies too. People who have been in contact with a rabid animal can receive medical treatment that will prevent them from developing the disease if they act quickly.

7. What should you do if you suspect your pet has rabies?

Prevent contact between the suspect animal and any other animals or people. Then contact your private vet, state vet or animal welfare clinic immediately. State vet contact details are available at <https://www.elsenburg.com/veterinary-services/animal-health-and-disease-control/>

8. What should you do if you think you have been in contact with a rabid animal?

If you have a wound or scratch, wash it very thoroughly with soap and water. Then go immediately to your nearest clinic or doctor and tell them that you suspect you have been in contact with a rabid animal. Do not wait; the sooner you receive treatment, the higher the chance that you will not develop rabies. Once symptoms of rabies show, it is too late.

Last updated: January 2022



Western Cape
Government



www.elsenburg.com



DOA.Info@westerncape.gov.za



@WCGovAgri

#ForTheLoveOfAgriculture