ZOONOTIC AND VECTOR-BORNE DISEASES

An update on rabies in South Africa

While no human rabies cases have been confirmed for 2020 in January and February, to date, 18 rabid dogs from KwaZulu-Natal Province (up to 20 February 2020), and five from the Eastern Cape Province (up to 29 January 2020) were laboratory confirmed (Figures 1 and 2). Each year, rabies causes approximately 59 000 human deaths worldwide, including an average of eight cases in South Africa during the past decade. The vast majority of reported animal rabies cases in South Africa and worldwide are in dogs. Accordingly, most human rabies cases are caused by dog bites. In previous years, including in 2016, human rabies cases were linked to outbreaks of dog rabies in KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape provinces. That said, rabies has been confirmed in a number of livestock and wildlife, mainly the black-backed jackal, yellow mongoose, bat-eared fox and bats. These wild animals seldom come in contact with people and therefore account for a very small percentage of human rabies cases.

In 2019, rabies was laboratory confirmed in 10 persons in South Africa. These cases were reported from Limpopo (n=2), KwaZulu-Natal (n=4) and Eastern Cape (n=4) provinces. In addition, six more deaths were classified as probable rabies cases, three each from KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape provinces.

Rabies is an incurable disease in humans upon the onset of clinical symptoms, but it may be prevented through vaccination of animals and rabies post-exposure prophylaxis following possible exposure events in humans. For more information on rabies and rabies post-exposure prophylaxis following dog bites and other animal exposures, visit www.nicd.ac.za.

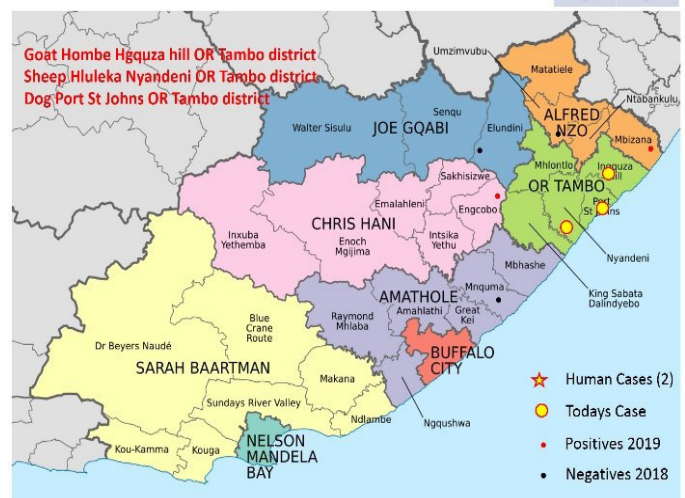**Article source:** Centre for Emerging Zoonotic and Parasitic Diseases, NICD-NHLS; januszp@nicd.ac.za

Figures 1 and 2. Canine and human rabies detection in KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape provinces
Source: Kevin le Roux, Department of Agriculture, environment and Rural Development, KwaZulu-Natal.