

ZOONOTIC AND VECTOR-BORNE DISEASES

An update on rabies in South Africa

No cases of human rabies have been laboratory confirmed in South Africa for 2020 to date. In 2019, South Africa reported a total of ten laboratory-confirmed cases. In addition, six more deaths were classified as probable rabies cases (cases were compatible with rabies clinical manifestations and a history of exposure, but it was not possible to confirm or exclude a diagnosis of rabies in the laboratory due to no or insufficient specimens received). The confirmed cases of 2019 were reported from Limpopo (n=2), KwaZulu-Natal (n=4) and Eastern Cape (n=4) provinces. Of the six probable cases from 2019, three each were reported from KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape provinces.

Positive animal case trends for 2020 have remained mostly consistent with that of 2019, apart from a rise in cases noted in March 2020. This was as a result of an aggressive outbreak in the south of eThekweni District (i.e. Durban) which accounts for 64% of KwaZulu-Natal's total cases for the year to date (Figure 1).

Rabies is a preventable disease. Domestic dogs and cats can be vaccinated against the disease, not only protecting the animal but also all persons who may come into contact with the animal. The Animal Diseases Act, 1984 (Act No 35 of 1984) law mandates owners to have their pets vaccinated against rabies between the ages of three and seven months, again at 12 months later and then every three years. It is important to note that the vast majority of human rabies cases in South Africa have been linked to exposures to rabid dogs. When a person comes into contact with a suspected or confirmed rabid animal, rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) can be given to prevent infection with the rabies virus.

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

Rabies PEP includes thorough wound washing with soap and water, followed by the administration of rabies vaccine and, if indicated, rabies immunoglobulin. For more details on how to prevent rabies virus infection, please visit the NICD website on <https://www.nicd.ac.za/diseases-a-z-index/rabies/>.

Healthcare workers can also consider completing an online course available through the Global Alliance for Rabies Control (GARC). The course is available free of charge on the GARC website (<https://rabiesalliance.org/capacity-building/gep>).

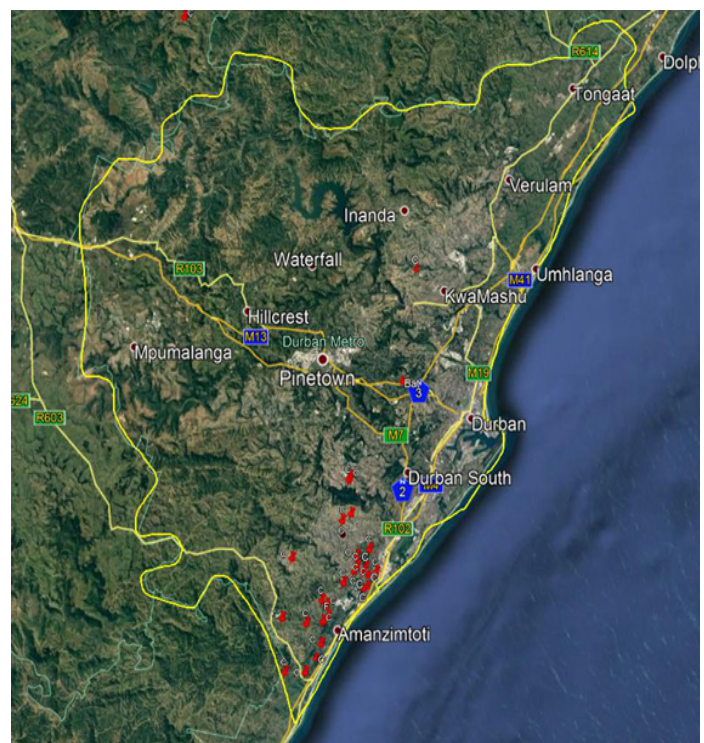


Figure 1. Distribution of positive animal cases for 2020 to date, eThekweni District, KwaZulu-Natal Province

Source: Kevin le Roux, Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Development, KwaZulu-Natal Province.