

ZOONOTIC AND VECTOR-BORNE DISEASES

An update on rabies in South Africa

No cases of human rabies have been laboratory-confirmed for 2020 to date in South Africa. One probable case was reported from the Eastern Cape Province in May 2020. While this case presented with a clinical and exposure history compatible with rabies, saliva and cerebrospinal fluid samples tested negative for rabies by PCR. South Africa recorded a total of eight laboratory-confirmed human rabies cases and two probable cases from screening and testing of 27 suspected patients during the first half (January – June) of 2019. So far, eight patients have been screened for rabies in 2020, far fewer than the number tested in the same timeframe (January – June) in 2019.

Over the past two decades, 41.9% of human rabies cases in South Africa have been reported from KwaZulu-Natal Province, followed by 24.3% and 21.9% respectively from the Eastern Cape and Limpopo provinces. The remaining cases were reported from Mpumalanga (4.8%), Free State (3.8%), North West (1.9%) and Northern Cape (1.0%) provinces (Figure 1). Most cases were males (71.2%), in children under the age of 18 years (73.4%) and from dog bites or saliva contact (92.4%).

Rabies is inevitably fatal once clinical symptoms show, but can be prevented with post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP). More information on the appropriate delivery of rabies PEP is available from the NICD website (www.nicd.ac.za).

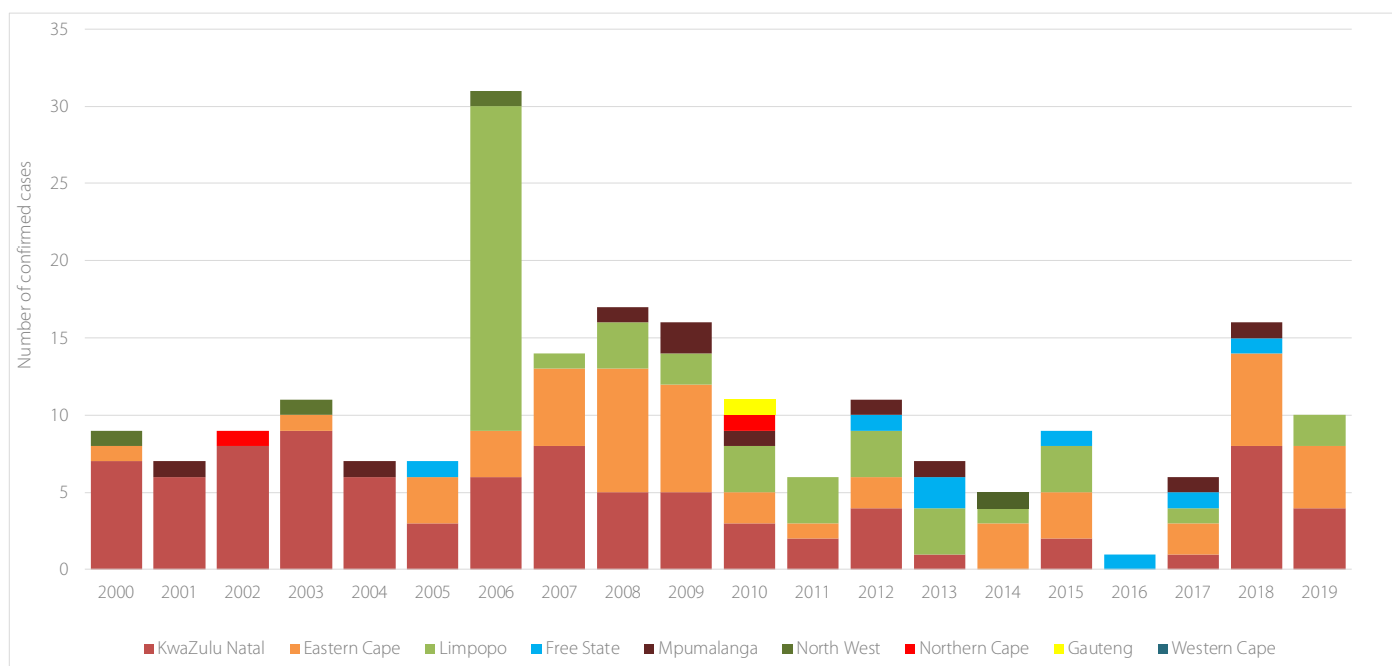


Figure 1. Laboratory-confirmed human rabies cases by province, South Africa, 2000-2019

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