

ZOONOTIC AND VECTOR-BORNE DISEASES

An update on rabies in South Africa

Since the last report, two new cases of human rabies in South Africa have been identified. This includes one laboratory confirmed case and one probable case. To date, two human rabies cases have been laboratory confirmed in South Africa (including the case reported here). These cases were reported from Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal provinces. In addition, three probable cases were reported (including one case reported here) from KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and Eastern Cape provinces.

Rabies was confirmed in a 9-year-old boy from Umbumbulu area, eThekweni, KwaZulu-Natal Province. The child fell ill during the first week of August, reportedly with flu-like symptoms including high fever and fatigue. The child later presented with anorexia, refusal of fluids and sleepiness. The child was also irritable, complaining of itchy feet, which he scratched profusely. He was subsequently admitted to a hospital. During hospitalisation, it was noted that the patient was confused and experiencing hallucinations. Saliva samples were submitted to the NICD for rabies RT-PCR and tested positive, confirming the diagnosis of rabies. The child died on 18 August. The exposure history of

the child is not confirmed, but a neighbour's dog may have bitten the child two months before onset of illness. Reportedly, the animal died shortly thereafter but was disposed of and not submitted for investigation.

A probable rabies case was reported as a 12-year-old girl from Thohoyandou, Vhembe District, Limpopo Province. The patient had behavioural changes at school, was vomiting and had abdominal pain. She later became restless and had a reduced level of consciousness. She died on 22 July 2020, a day after hospital admission. Allegedly, a neighbour's dog scratched her but the circumstances were vague and the child never received rabies post-exposure prophylaxis. A blood sample submitted for the patient was not adequate for testing. Given the patient's clinical presentation and possible history of rabies exposure, the case was classified as a probable case of rabies as laboratory confirmation was not possible.

Information regarding rabies, vaccination and collection of specimens for laboratory testing is available on the NICD website: www.nicd.ac.za

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INTERNATIONAL OUTBREAKS OF IMPORTANCE

A description of a COVID-19 cluster in repatriated South African citizens linked to a religious gathering in Pakistan

In March 2020, the South African government joined other world governments by repatriating their citizens stranded abroad due to travel restrictions enforced globally. On 21 April 2020, a group of 85 individuals, the majority of whom had travelled for Jamaat (an Islamic missionary movement) prior to the holy month of Ramadan, were repatriated from Pakistan to South Africa after completing a quarantine period and testing negative for SARS-CoV-2 in Pakistan. On arrival in South Africa, they were quarantined at one of the many designated quarantine sites across Gauteng Province. Eleven of the 85 (13%)

repatriates tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 after being in quarantine for eight days in South Africa.

A cross-sectional study with supporting descriptive analysis was performed to identify and verify the existence of a cluster of SARS-CoV-2 amongst the repatriates at the quarantine site. Additional objectives were to describe the characteristics of positive COVID-19 cases identified, identify common exposures of the cluster and to institute control measures for prevention of transmission.