

ZOONOTIC AND VECTOR-BORNE DISEASES

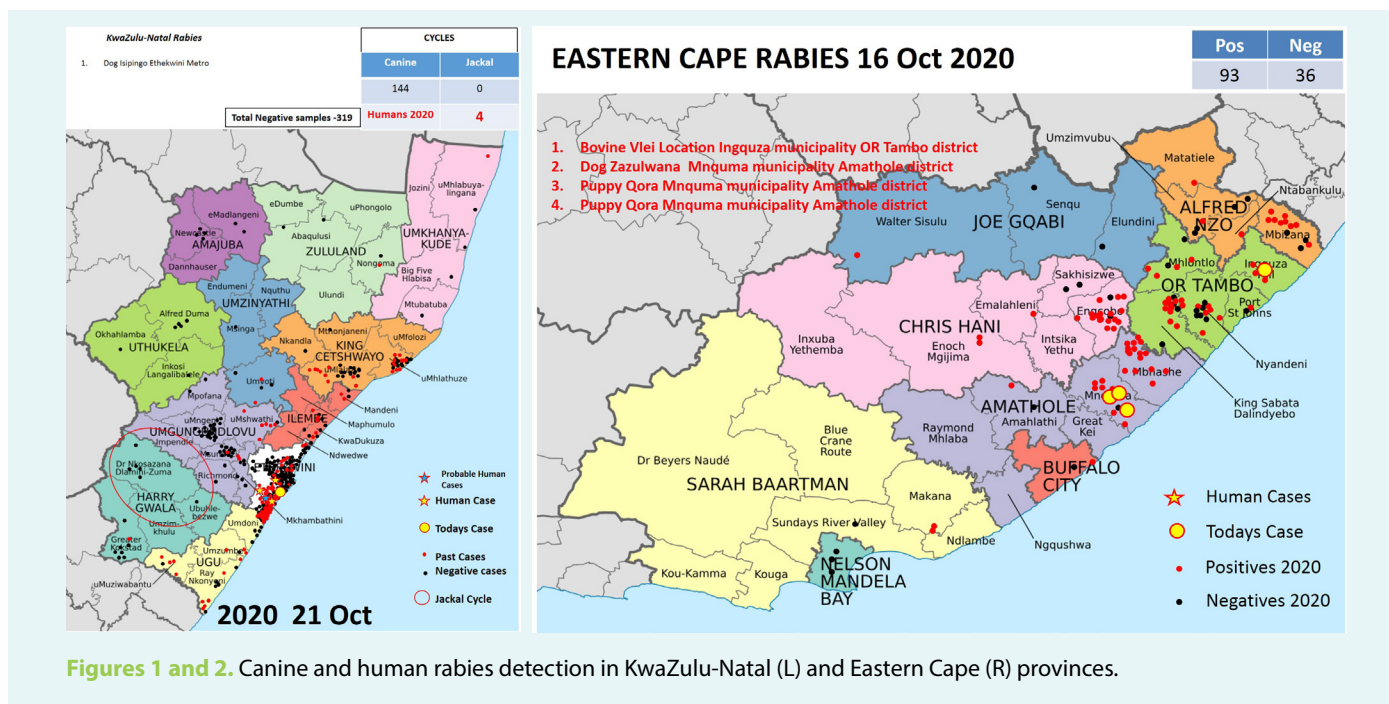
## An update on rabies in South Africa

No laboratory-confirmed or clinically diagnosed cases of human rabies has been reported in South Africa in recent weeks. For 2020 to date, the cumulative number of human rabies related deaths is seven. This includes four laboratory confirmed cases reported from the eThekweni District of Kwazulu-Natal Province (n=3), and the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province (n=1). In addition, three probable cases were reported from Kwazulu-Natal, Limpopo and Eastern Cape provinces. Probable cases are cases with a clinical and epidemiological history consistent with a rabies diagnosis, but without laboratory confirmation.

In South Africa, rabies is endemic and cases have mostly been reported from the provinces along the east coast. In particular, Kwazulu-Natal and Eastern Cape provinces have experienced repeated outbreaks of rabies in dogs. A total of 144 rabid dogs was reported in Kwazulu-Natal Province this year as of 21 October (Figure 1). As of 16 October, 93 animals that died of rabies were identified in the Eastern Cape Province, most of which were dogs (Figure 2). The primary source of human rabies

infections in Africa is dogs. Safe and effective animal and human vaccines exist to prevent human rabies deaths, while community awareness and continued education about rabies is a key factor in preventing rabies. While the global strategic plan is to end human deaths from dog-mediated rabies by 2030, one has to emphasise that achieving this goal might be difficult due to complex wildlife reservoir systems maintaining the rabies virus in nature. The Animal Diseases Act, 1984 (Act No 35 of 1984) requires owners to vaccinate their pets against rabies between the ages of 3 and 7 months, at 12 months and then every 3 years. Rabies is 100% fatal, but also 100% preventable in humans with prompt and complete post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP). Rabies PEP involves thorough wound washing with soap and water, followed by administration of the rabies vaccine, and if indicated, rabies immunoglobulin injections.

For additional information on rabies and disease prevention, please visit the NICD website: <https://www.nicd.ac.za/diseases-a-z-index/rabies/>



Figures 1 and 2. Canine and human rabies Human detection in KwaZulu-Natal (L) and Eastern Cape (R) provinces.

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

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