

EC farmers warned of possibility of Rift Valley Fever - Humans also at risk, but no cases recorded in region so far

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The Eastern Cape department of rural development & agrarian reform is anticipating a fatal fever will hit livestock – and humans could be affected as well.

Rift Valley Fever occurs after a five to 10 year drought. The province is at risk because it has been in the clutches of a severe drought since 2015.

Department director Vusi Rozani told the Dispatch this week: "It usually happens when there is high average rainfall after a long period of drought (five to 10 years)."

He said good rain stimulated the activity of mosquitoes and other biting flies that carried the virus.

According to the World Health Organisation, the virus was first identified on a farm in Kenya's Rift Valley in 1931.

In 2010, 237 cases of the virus were identified in humans in SA, with 26 deaths being reported across all nine provinces.

The most recent outbreak of Rift Valley Fever for SA was in 2018, detected on a single farm in the Jacobsdal area of the Free State.

According to the National Institute for Communicable Diseases, a total of 250 sheep deaths and abortions were documented and confirmed by a laboratory on May 16 2018.

Subsequently, eight cases in humans were confirmed, from 10 samples from humans submitted.

To date, there are no cases in the Eastern Cape.

"However, the department is spreading awareness so that farmers can be ready in the event of an outbreak," Rozani said.

"The disease causes pregnant animals, especially sheep, to abort. This can have a serious impact on the economy of the country due to loss of revenue from wool, lambs and good genetic material."

Rozani said farmers were advised to vaccinate their livestock before the rainy season.

"Veterinary services personnel are advised all the time to take precautionary measures whenever they handle animals, especially when assisting in difficult deliveries, postmortems and meat inspections at the abattoirs. They must put on their protective clothing, which comprises overalls, safety boots, goggles and visors," Rozani said.

He said the fever could be transmitted to humans when animal secretions, blood or meat from an infected animal gained access through wounds, cuts on the skin, ingestion and through the conjunctiva.

He said the fever was prevalent in SubSaharan Africa.

"If there is higher than normal rainfall, there is a fear that this may stimulate the activity of biting insects such as mosquitoes and midges. The disease is spread by such biting insects," Rozani said.

African Farmers ' Association of SA chair Mhlobo Mbane said farmers were aware of the virus and were well equipped.

He said farmers who relied on state vets would be pleased that level one of the lockdown would allow them to go out to the farms.

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Caption:

Eastern Cape **farmers** have been **warned** that the province faces the possibility of a Rift Valley Fever outbreak.