



agriculture, land reform  
& rural development

Department:  
Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



forestry, fisheries  
& the environment

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Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment  
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health

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## MEDIA RELEASE

26 November 2024

### **Statement by the Department of Agriculture, Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, Department of Health and the National Institute for Communicable Diseases:**

#### **As the holidays approach, the public and travellers are warned about rabies in dogs, Cape fur seals and other animals in South Africa**

Collectively, the departments wish to alert members of the public about high risk rabies areas in South Africa where the disease occurs in dogs, Cape fur seals and other animals. Rabies is a deadly viral disease that affects all mammals and can be spread from animals to humans. The virus is transmitted in the saliva of infected animals through bites, scratches and licks. Rabies affects the brain and is fatal once a person or animal shows clinical signs, but it can be prevented through vaccination of animals and immediate medical attention in people exposed to an infected animal.

Multiple reports of attacks on humans by aggressive Cape fur seals has been reported over the last few months along the Cape coastline. This is the first incidence of rabies being maintained in a marine mammal population. The Public is urged to take note of this new risk of rabies in Cape fur seals and keep a respectful distance from these animals.

There have been human deaths attributed to rabies from dogs in KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape, Limpopo and North West in 2024. The Public is urged to stay away from stray animals and not to touch animals they don't know. If a person suspects that an animal has rabies, this should be reported to the local state veterinary office, local welfare authority, wildlife rescue centre, Protected Areas Management Authority or the police.



## **How would I know if an animal might have rabies?**

Animals with rabies show changes in behaviour (abnormal behaviour) and signs of disease of the brain. They may drool a lot, become paralysed, are unable to swallow, continuously vocalise (barking, whining, howling, etc.), and become aggressive, or they may just appear weak and in a comatose state. Any mammal can become infected with rabies, including dogs, cats, livestock, jackals, foxes, mongooses, Cape fur seals, etc.

## **Where does rabies occur in South Africa?**

Even though rabies occurs in all nine provinces of South Africa, rabies in dogs is common in KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape and Limpopo. Rabies in Cape fur seals are found and known to travel along the coastline of the Northern Cape, Western Cape and Eastern Cape (up to Algoa Bay).

## **What should I do if I was bitten or scratched by a rabid animal?**

If a person is bitten, scratched, or licked by an animal suspected to have rabies, wash the wound well with soap and running water and immediately seek treatment at the nearest clinic or hospital to prevent rabies virus infection. For more information about rabies post-exposure prophylaxis, visit the NICD website ([www.nicd.ac.za/diseases-a-z-index/rabies/](http://www.nicd.ac.za/diseases-a-z-index/rabies/)).

## **How do I keep my animals safe?**

All dogs and cats must be correctly vaccinated against rabies throughout their lives. This is required by law. If you walk your dogs, keep them under control or on a leash to avoid contact with other animals. Enquire with your local state veterinarian, animal health technician, private veterinarian or animal welfare organisation for access to rabies vaccinations.

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