



Rabies

What You Need to Know About Rabies and Seals in South Africa

1. Does rabies affect seals?

Reports of rabies in seals prior to 2024 have been exceedingly rare. However, since May 2024, several cases of rabies in Cape fur seals found along the coast of the Western Cape and Northern Cape provinces of South Africa have been reported. Rabies have, however, not been found in other marine mammal species.

2. What is the risk of rabies in seals?

Seals can travel long distances along the coast, with Cape fur seals breeding all along the coast of southern Africa between southern Angola and Algoa Bay in the Eastern Cape. People can encounter seals when they are found on beaches and in harbours along this coastline. Often, seals are also tourist attractions. Cases of close encounters with seals have also been reported among swimmers, divers and surfers.

3. What to do if you encounter an aggressive seal?

It is recommended to avoid the animal and not to approach it. Keep people and animals away from it as far as possible, and contact your local state veterinary office so appropriate actions can be taken.

4. What should I do if I was attacked by a seal?

It is recommended that you try to get to a point of safety as soon as possible. All wounds, big or small, should be washed thoroughly with soap and water. Visit your nearest healthcare facility **urgently** so that the risk for

rabies exposure can be assessed and rabies post-exposure prophylaxis provided if needed. Rabies post-exposure prophylaxis is effective in preventing rabies virus infection if applied urgently and appropriately. The wound/wounds should be cleaned again at the health care facility, and you may also require additional attention, for example, antibiotic treatment, tetanus booster vaccination, suturing, etc. Persons who may be at frequent or continual risk of exposure, such as frequent swimmers, divers, surfers or persons working with seals, should consult their healthcare provider and assess the need for rabies pre-exposure prophylaxis.

Some tips on rabies and seals

- Remember that seals are wild animals, and best to admire them from a distance
- Ensure that all pets taken to the beach have been vaccinated for rabies and that their vaccination schedule is up to date
- Report seals (or any other animals) behaving suspiciously to your local state veterinary office so that the appropriate actions can be taken

1. What is the risk of contracting mpox in South Africa?

The implications for South Africa are that the risk of importation of mpox is a reality as lessons learnt from COVID-19 have illustrated that outbreaks in another part of the world can fast become a global concern. The WHO has not recommended any travel restrictions and are working with the affected countries to limit transmission and determine sources of exposure.

The risk of mpox to the South African population remains low, given the low transmissibility of the virus. Nevertheless, South Africa has diagnosed five cases from the multi-country outbreak as of 14 March 2023, all men between 28 and 41 years of age, three of which with recent travel from Switzerland, Spain and Netherlands.

2. Where can I find more information?

Laboratory results and queries:

Dr Jacqueline Weyer 011 386 6376 jacquelinew@nicd.ac.za

Dr Naazneen Moolla 011 386 6338 naazneenm@nicd.ac.za

Clinical queries (Healthcare workers only):

NICD Doctor on Call 0800 212 552

Outbreak related queries:

NICD Outbreak Team outbreak@nicd.ac.za

Media/Press queries:

Mr Vuyo Sabani VuyoS@nioh.ac.za

Other:

Guidelines and other useful resources are available on the NICD website: www.nicd.ac.za/mpox

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, United States of America. <https://www.cdc.gov/poxvirus/mpox/index.html>

World Health Organization. <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs161/en/>