



agriculture

Department:
Agriculture
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



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MEDIA RELEASE

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

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

There have been human deaths attributed to rabies from dogs in KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape and Limpopo in 2025. The public is urged to keep away from stray animals and not to touch them. If a person suspects that an animal has rabies, he/she should report this to the local state veterinary office, local welfare authority, or the police.

Rabies has also unfortunately become endemic in the Cape fur seal population and some cases are being detected on Cape beaches. Seals may also carry numerous other diseases that can be transmitted to humans, and their sharp teeth can cause physical damage. The Public is urged to take note of the risk of rabies and other hazards in Cape fur seals and keep a respectful distance from these animals, including seal pups.

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, be 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?

Rabies occurs in all nine provinces of South Africa and may be seen in dogs, cats, wildlife, and livestock. Rabies in dogs poses the biggest risk to human populations and is common in KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape and Limpopo. Rabies in Cape fur seals has become endemic and can occur along the coastline of Northern Cape, Western Cape and Eastern Cape (up to Algoa Bay).

What should I do if I am bitten or scratched by a rabid animal?

If you are bitten, scratched, or licked by an animal suspected to have rabies, wash the wound immediately with soap and running water for at least 15 minutes, and thereafter, seek treatment at the nearest clinic or hospital as soon as possible, to prevent rabies virus infection.

For further information about rabies post-exposure prophylaxis, visit the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) website (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 stray dogs, seals, and wildlife. When travelling with your pets, ensure that they are up-to-date with their rabies vaccinations and carry their vaccination booklets with you. Enquire with your local state veterinarian, animal health technician, private veterinarian, or animal welfare organisation for access to rabies vaccinations.

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