

Media Release

27 September 2017

## **World Rabies Day – A call to end rabies by 2030**

Globally it is estimated that up to 59 000 people die of rabies annually, this amounts to a rabies death every 10 minutes. Rabies is a neglected disease in most developing countries that means although the tried-and-tested strategies for controlling and preventing the disease exists, it is not prioritized and invested in. Rabies is a fatal viral infection of the brain that is transmitted from infected animals to humans. Rabies is a progressive disease and once a person starts developing symptoms it usually takes no more than two weeks for them to slip into a coma and die.

World Rabies Day, commemorated on the September 28th, focuses on rabies endemic countries, to increase community awareness of the disease and its prevention. World Rabies Day also raises the profile of national and local control programmes and acts as a springboard for year-round capacity building and awareness.

Human rabies can be prevented in almost 100% of cases if correct post-exposure preventative treatment is given timorously following exposure to suspected rabid animals. The rabies virus is transmitted from infected animals to humans through scratches, bites or licks on mucous membranes of the lips or eyes. The virus cannot be transmitted through intact skin, so touching, petting or being close to the animals is not a risk.

Outbreaks in domestic dogs only occur if the animals are not sufficiently vaccinated against the disease. Therefore any community in South Africa may be at risk for introduction of the virus when these measures are not in place. It is critically that all dog and cat owners ensure that their animals have been vaccinated against rabies within the past 3 years in order to protect their pets, themselves and their children against this uniform ally fatal disease. The first animal vaccine is given at three months of age with a booster within the following nine months.

Preventative measures include the following: Washing of the wound very well for at least 10 minutes with water or soap and water to wash out the virus, and a course of rabies

vaccinations into the arm so that the person can make antibodies against the rabies virus. If there is a scratch with blood or a bite the addition of concentrated rabies antibodies into the wound is important to immediately 'neutralize' the virus.

**Take home message:**

- Rabies is a serious and deadly viral disease occurring in South Africa
- Rabies is controllable through vaccination of pets, most importantly dogs
- Rabies is preventable when rabies post exposure prophylaxis is provided once a possible exposure to the virus occurred. Seek urgent medical attention when exposed to possibly rabid animal
- Elimination of rabies in South Africa is possible. Play your part and vaccinate your pets!

**For media enquiries:**

Nombuso Shabalala

Tel: 011 555 0545

Cell: 082 886 4238

Email: [nombusos@nicd.ac.za](mailto:nombusos@nicd.ac.za)

Sinenhlanhla Jimoh

Tel: 011 386 6409

Cell: 082 609 9514

email: [sinenhlanhlaj@nicd.ac.za](mailto:sinenhlanhlaj@nicd.ac.za)