

Triplet's rabies torment

Devastated father tells of son's death after bite from stray cat

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A HEARTBROKEN father has spoken for the first time of how his three-year-old son, who was one of a set of triplets, died of rabies after protracted agony.

"We lost our three-year-old son. We cannot have another son and his sisters are up and down," he told *The Witness* yesterday.

The boy was bitten by a stray cat on New Year's Day while the family was holidaying at a beach resort in Stanger.

The father, who asked that he and his family remain unnamed, said he, his wife and the rest of the family are devastated.

The family had no clue when the little boy was bitten that the cat had rabies.

The child became ill several weeks later and died at Hillcrest Private Hospital on February 19.

Blood results and a lumbar puncture came back positive for rabies.

"When we went on holiday, there was a feral cat programme being run that we were unaware of."

He said there was a cat wandering around the resort, which bit his son.

"We asked if the cats had been vaccinated, they said yes and said our son was attacked because he was too close to the cat's litter of kittens."

He said when they were told the cat had been vaccinated, they did not worry about the risk of rabies again.

"He started getting sick towards the end of January. We took him to a doctor who said he had a severe sinus infection. He told us to come back in two days if nothing changed and two days later we were back and the doctor told us our son was dehydrated and he was booked into hospital.

"He was hallucinating. I mentioned the cat bite to the doctors at the hospi-

tal so they tried to sedate him to conduct a CT scan.

"They gave him enough sedatives to knock out an adult but they did not work on him. Eventually they called a doctor to put him under anesthetic so they could do an MRI scan but he even woke up during the scan."

The father said he then drove to the resort and asked if the cat that had bitten his son was still alive.

"They showed us a cat that looked similar but we cannot be sure."

He said the state vet in Stanger told him that a dead cat had been found the day before, however the body was too decomposed to test.

"Our whole family is being treated for rabies now. It has just been a nightmare and I do not know what to do. I am angry. I want my children to be educated. We never knew how serious rabies was."

"If your child is scratched or bitten by any animal, do not bet that it has had its vaccines. Do not take chances."

The emotional father said he and his wife had a "strong family" who were supporting them.

Meanwhile, the manager of the beach resort, who also asked not to be named, said the feral cat programme was not run on their property but near their grounds. He said the area has a "massive problem" with feral cats. He said people arrive at the beach only to dump their cats and leave.

He said the cat the family pointed out as being the one that bit the three-year-old child is still alive and that everyone was still "trying to figure out what is going on".

He said he was devastated for the family and that following the incident, a number of the feral cat handlers had started a course of rabies vaccines.

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