

Vaccination drive to eradicate rabies

A dog or cat bite is fatal but myths are making communities hesitate

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THE provincial department of agriculture and rural development is aiming to vaccinate 70% of the province's dog population, following an increase in the number of rabies cases being reported.

MEC, Themba Mthembu, said they were pulling out all the stops, including teaming up with the SPCA and other private veterinary services to curb this scourge that has already claimed four lives.

Mthembu, who was leading a team of vets in a massive vaccination drive in the suburb of Northdale in Pietermaritzburg, where a total of 15 000 dogs were targeted, said the inocula-

tion programme had to be intensified with the latest partnerships to boost efforts and ensure greater accessibility to vaccines to previously disadvantaged communities.

"To date, we have lost four lives through dog and cat bites in the province. Three out of those four were children.

We are encouraging the public to disregard this misconception and bring their pets to vaccination clinics across the province. A dog or cat bite is fatal. They must not wait until another death happens," Mthembu said.

He said the campaign to stamp out rabies in the province is competing against a widening myth, especially in rural communities, that the vaccines

kill the hunting instinct and has a contraceptive effect in dogs, which deters some community members from bringing dogs for vaccinations.

The department's chief director of veterinary services, Dr Dumisani Mtshali, said research shows that by vaccinating 70% of the dog population in the province, they can eradicate rabies in a short space of time.

"We are currently only able to vaccinate between 30-39% of the dog population due to the cases of non-cooperation caused by negligence and myths in the communities."

An amount of R6m for medicine and an additional 22 vehicles are part of the programme.

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TAKING PRECAUTION: Agriculture and rural development MEC Themba Mthembu inspects the vaccination process.