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VACCINATE ALL PETS, RABIES ON THE RISE

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As Rabies Awareness Day approaches on September 28, people have been urged to vaccinate their animals, as positive rabies cases seem to be increasing in the uMgungundlovu District.

According to statistics on the Kwa-Zulu-Natal Department of Agriculture and Rural Development website, by September 6 and 7 there were 159 positive cases this year, with four cases detected in humans. Of these cases, 136 were found in dogs and there were also positive cases in cows, goats and cats.

Spokesperson for the department, Vusi Zuma said the numbers of animal cases have slightly decreased this year but KZN had a serious problem having one of the biggest outbreaks in history.

"The disease is moving inland towards uMgungundlovu where the first signs of a potentially large outbreak has occurred. From the map, eThekweni is the hardest hit by far; however, it is showing an improvement from last year. The biggest success story is King Cetshwayo, which drastically reduced the amount of rabies cases over the past three years," said Zuma.

On Friday, the Hilton Veterinary Hospital had its first positive case from a dog. According to the hospital, it last

had a positive case about a year ago.

At least three children have died of rabies in KZN this year. A five-year-old died in Eshowe earlier this year while another child died in May in Nongoma and another in Umbumbulu last month.

According to a National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) communiqué, a child was bitten by a dog in Nongoma in May. He reportedly did not receive any rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) and was only brought to a neighbouring clinic when he started to feel lethargic, itchy and experienced a loss of appetite.

"He was eventually taken to a hospital in the uMkhanyakude District." The child died and rabies was confirmed.

The second child from Umbumbulu died last month after being diagnosed with clinically suspected rabies. She was hospitalised with symptoms of malaise, anxiety, aerophobia (a fear of drafts or fresh air), anorexia, and hydrophobia (fear of water).

Zuma said the department has issued a stern warning to pet owners in the province.

"Get all dogs and cats vaccinated which is law. If one is bitten they must wash the wound for 10 minutes in running water, disinfect the wound then go to a hospital or clinic immediately," said Zuma.