

Clamp down on animal health

Agriculture threaten strong measures, even criminal charges, against pet owners who do not vaccinate pets

TNA REPORTER

THE department of agriculture and rural development in KwaZulu-Natal is set to take tougher action against irresponsible pet owners who do not vaccinate their pets for rabies.

MEC Themba Mthembu yesterday announced these drastic measures at the launch of the provincial animal healthcare programme in Itshelimnyama outside Durban.

Mthembu said the government would lay criminal charges against pet owners who defied the departments call for them to vaccinate domestic animals against rabies.

He also issued a stern warning to hundreds of dog owners who flocked to mobile clinics with their dogs for vaccination, saying keeping an unvaccinated pet in their homes would be considered a criminal act.

"I would like to warn you that failure to cooperate with the government's animal healthcare programme will bring criminal charges," Mthembu said.

The area of Itshelimnyama is among the worse affected by rabies in the eThekweni region.

An elderly woman from the Mazibuko family in Itshelimnyama was recently hospitalised after she was bitten by a dog with rabies.

A few years ago, two people were

hospitalised after they were bitten by a rabid dog.

Before the formal programme started, Mthembu paid visits to several households, including the two families whose dogs bit two people five days ago, for inspection. He recounted his discoveries to the media.

"What we discovered is that those homes remain unfenced, even those that have dogs that bit two people."

He called on community members to treat all pets prone to the rabies infection.

"I am shocked that I do not see even one cat brought for vaccination," Mthembu said.

The animal healthcare mobile clinics are set to cover the province.

Provincial state veterinarian Dr Cameron Kuthano, who is in charge of the programme, said the programme was ready to be rolled out to all communities of the province.

He said a big challenge was that some communities did not take their pets' health seriously.

Nompumelo Majazi said many people were ignorant about the need to immunise their pets.

"By virtue of being in semi-rural areas, most of us do not know how to take care for our animals," Majazi said.

However, she thanked the government for introducing the programme.



STERN WARNING: MEC for agriculture and rural development Themba Mthembu says keeping an unvaccinated pet in the home will be considered a criminal act. PICTURE: GETTY IMAGES