

Province in bid to tackle rabies

Communities are encouraged to take their pets for vaccination to promote a healthy animal population

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THE provincial agriculture and rural development department, through its veterinary services unit, will be joining animal organisations across the world in marking World Rabies Day on Thursday by embarking on a week-long rabies awareness campaign in communities across the province.

Rabies continues to pose a major threat to public health, the department said.

The department said the Free State, KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga and Limpopo were most affected by rabies.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), a person dies every 15 minutes worldwide due to rabies.

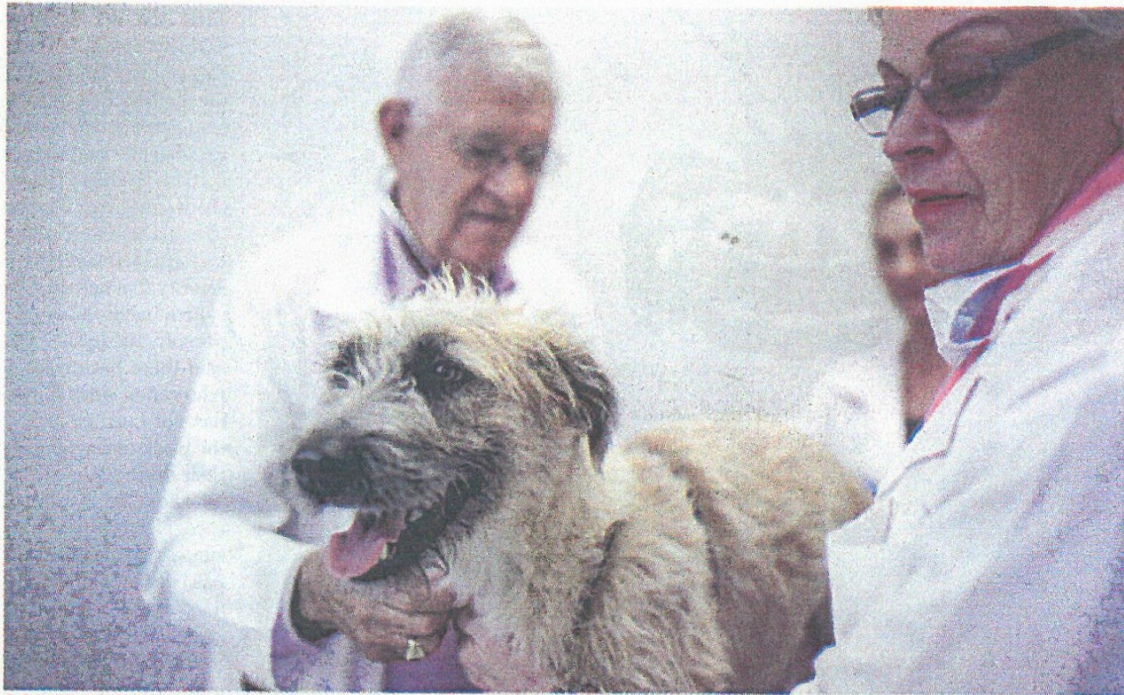
Of these deaths, 40% of the victims are reportedly under the age of 15.

Rabies is an infectious viral disease that is transmitted from animals to humans. It is almost always fatal.

Dogs are the main source of human rabies deaths, contributing up to 99% of all rabies transmissions to humans.

If the virus reaches the brain, it can result in one of two clinical manifestations, furious rabies, which is the most common cause of human rabies, accounting for about 80% of cases, with the other clinical manifestation being paralytic.

“Dog-mediated human rabies disproportionately affects poor rural communities, particularly children, with the



SCREENING: A week-long awareness campaign will be carried out throughout the province by the department of agriculture and rural development ahead of World Rabies Day on Thursday. PICTURE: GETTY IMAGES

majority (80%) of human deaths occurring in rural areas, where awareness and access to appropriate post-exposure prophylaxis is limited or non-existent,” the organisation has said.

The disease is 100% vaccine preventable, with countries that have had programmes on rabies awareness and elimination experiencing a reduction

in cases.

Agriculture MEC Oupa Khoabane said the province needed a sustainable rabies control programme whereby dog owners ensured that their pets were vaccinated.

He said it required commitment from dog owners across the country.

“We encourage our communities to

take their pets for vaccination to promote a healthy animal population in our households because if we don’t, our children are at high risk of being affected by rabies,” Khoabane said.

The disease can affect all warm-blooded animals, with dogs being of concern as they are usually domestic pets that are in close proximity to humans.

How to prevent rabies

- Avoid dog bites
- Learn dogs’ body language
- Get medical care immediately after a bite
- Vaccinating 70% of dogs breaks the cycle of rabies transmission
- Although dogs are the primary source of rabies in South Africa, rabies affects other animals too and it is wise to vaccinate all animals against rabies, particularly livestock.

The Animal Diseases Act 35 of 198 dictates that dogs and cats be vaccinated.

When bitten by an affected animal victims must seek medical care immediately. A rabies immune globulin injection that helps to prevent the virus from infecting the individual is given straight away.

This is followed by four injections over the next two weeks. These are rabies vaccines to help the body fight the virus.

It takes two to 10 weeks for people as well as animals, to show signs of infection. Once people or animals show signs of clinical rabies, the disease is nearly always fatal.

“This is a clear demonstration by the department to radically serve people with the dignity they deserve,” Khoabane said.

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