

Shortage of rabies treatment

Plasma donors needed in KZN

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THERE is a critical shortage of rabies immuno-globulin (RIG) – the key ingredient in the treatment for victims who have been bitten or scratched by a rabid animal.

This has raised concern after the recent outbreak in the province.

The immuno-globulin is produced from plasma collected from donors and yesterday the SA National Blood Service said the plasma collected this year fell far short of requirements and made an urgent appeal for donors.

National marketing manager Silungile Mlambo said: "There is a major shortage of supply as we do not have voluntary blood donors who are donating on the rabies plasma programme. South Africa needs about 295 plasma donors who donate at least 12 times a year to meet demand, but there are only between 280 and 320 donors who donate

about seven times a year.

"This has led to service collecting only 1450 litres plasma last year, significantly less than the 2300 litres required."

The shortage of hyper-immune donors forces the National Bioproducts Institute, which produces the immuno-globulin, to import hyper-immune plasma at a high cost.

Mlambo urged South Africans who had already been vaccinated against rabies to donate plasma in an effort to alleviate the current shortage.

"Even if you have not been vaccinated against rabies you can still become a hyperimmune donor. SANBS will provide the necessary vaccinations to build up your antibodies to the required levels. South Africans have it in their hands to make a difference."

Last week, Salt Rock resident Michelle Phillips described her encounter with a rabid dog and is undergoing treatment.

Yesterday, vet Dr Van-

essa Meyer, who started the Rabies Awareness Body in Eshowe, confirmed that five people from the area were

undergoing treatment and that results were being awaited for seven dogs suspected of having rabies.

"It's important to be aware that you can be infected through either a bite or a scratch as dogs drool. It is also

important that the public do not presume their pets are safe from rabies if they are behind a fence because a rabid dog



INOCULATION: SPCA Durban and Coastal animal welfare assistant Philani Chili checks in a puppy for its rabies jab. It is a legal requirement for pet owners to inoculate against the deadly disease.
PICTURE: LEON LESTRADE

could nip it on the nose and you may not even notice it."

To become a plasma donor, a volunteer is given a course of injections. If a volunteer has never been vaccinated against rabies, they will go through a course of three injections. Blood samples are taken to check if the donor has built up sufficient levels of rabies antibodies before being booked for a plasma donation. If the volunteer has previously had a rabies injection, only a booster injection is required.

On Wednesday, KZN MEC for Agriculture and Rural Development Themba Mthembu marked World Rabies Day at Shallcross in Durban, saying the province had remained rabies free for 18 months prior to the recent reports.

A 2-year-old died after being bitten by a rabid dog in the iLembe District which was followed by a slew of cases in Durban (Inanda), iLembe (Ndwedwe, Bamshela, Maphumulo) and King Cetshwayo (Eshowe, Richards Bay).

Mthembu confirmed funding has been set aside for vaccinations with an anti-rabies drive being rolled out across the province.

For more info on plasma donating go to www.sanbs.org.za