

Global elimination of rabies in humans : actions at the animal reservoir

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At a high level technical meeting in Mexico in 2011, rabies control was identified as a model for inter-sectoral collaboration to address health risks at the human-animal- ecosystem interface. The Global Conference for Rabies Control, organised by OIE, together with WHO and FAO, in Korea, in 2011, highlighted the importance of rabies control in the animal reservoir to achieve worldwide elimination of rabies in humans.

Despite being 100% preventable, rabies still causes between 50,000 and 70,000 human deaths annually, mainly in developing countries in Africa and Asia. The majority of these deaths are caused by rabid dogs, which are reservoirs of the infection. Dog vaccination and dog population management are the most cost-effective interventions to control rabies at the animal reservoir. Dog health, particularly in stray dog populations, is, however, often neglected in endemic countries. Add to this, a lack of awareness in the community and the veterinary services, inadequate distribution of resources, and deficiencies at the technical level, and the result is a perpetuation of neglect and a continuation of human deaths caused by rabies that could have been prevented.

Recent changes to the rabies chapter 8.10. of the Terrestrial Animal Health Code of the OIE, may have important consequences for public health, international trade and transport of dogs and other carnivores from and to rabies-infected countries. For the purpose of the Terrestrial Code, a country that does not fulfil the requirements of Article 8.10.2. is now automatically considered to be infected with rabies virus. Furthermore, and again for the purpose of the Terrestrial Code, rabies is now considered to be linked to only one member of the *Lyssavirus* genus : the rabies virus (formerly referred to as classical rabies virus, genotype-1). In line with the ongoing process to integrate wildlife into the Terrestrial Code where relevant (for the status of domestic animals), several articles on the importation of a variety of domestic and wild animals (captive, feral or wild) have been amalgamated into two articles dealing with “*domestic ruminants, equids, camelids and suids*” (Article 10.6.)- and “*wildlife*” (Article 10.8).

The model veterinary certificate with regard to rabies has been revised in accordance and the distinction between the responsibility for private veterinarians to vaccinate and for official veterinarians to certify has been made clearer. New scientific information on serological testing of animals for rabies antibodies and oral vaccination, have been included in the rabies chapter 2.1.13 of the Manual of Diagnostic Tests and Vaccines of Terrestrial Animals of the OIE.

The articles on rabies remain intrinsically linked to those on stray dog population control (Article 7.7.), which were recently adopted as part of the international animal welfare standards of the OIE

In 2012, the OIE launched an EU-funded vaccine bank for rabies in Asia. With an overall capacity of 4 million doses of rabies vaccine for dogs, 750,000 doses have already been delivered to Lao PDR, Vietnam and the Philippines up to March 2013.

Finally, the OIE continues to work together with FAO, WHO and other international partners, such as the Global Alliance for Rabies Control, in the fight against rabies at the main source of human deaths.