



DEADLY DISEASE

For animals
AND humans

Rabies is the oldest infectious disease known to medical science. It has been associated with animal bites for more than 3000 years. Although it causes fewer deaths in humans and animals than anthrax or smallpox, it is probably the most feared of all diseases. It is a fatal disease in humans and animals.

Rabies is endemic throughout South-Africa and the disease is currently responsible for 10 – 30 laboratory confirmed human deaths each year.

We would like to answer some frequently asked questions to put your mind at ease.

1. How often should I vaccinate my dog against rabies?

Regulations state: Puppies must be vaccinated at the age of 3 months followed by a booster within 12 months, at least 30 days after the first vaccination and thereafter every three years.

2. Should I have my cat vaccinated against rabies?

Regulations state: All dogs and cats should be vaccinated against rabies. The vaccination regime for cats is the same as for dogs.

3. Is it safe to give rabies vaccine at the same time as the other vaccines?

Yes, all dogs and cats, regardless of age, weight or pregnancy, may safely be vaccinated.

4. How soon after vaccination are my pets protected against rabies?

Pets are protected within 2 weeks of vaccination.

5. Should wild animals, which are kept as pets, be vaccinated against rabies?

Yes they should, but trials have not been performed in these species to determine vaccine efficacy or the ideal vaccination schedule.

6. What side effects will rabies vaccination have on my animal?

There are no side effects. Some rabies vaccines burn more than others due to adjuvants added to the vaccine.

7. My child was bitten by a mouse (shrew, rat, and monkey). Should he/she receive anti-rabies treatment?

No, mice, rats, shrews and monkeys have not been incriminated as carriers/vectors of rabies in SA.

8. Can birds contract rabies?

No

9. Do I need to travel with my pet's vaccination record?

South Africa, in its entirety, is considered a rabies endemic area. All interprovincial movement of dogs and cats must be accompanied by a valid rabies vaccination certificate.

10. Can my dog/cat be tested for rabies?

A Rabies diagnosis is confirmed with laboratory procedures performed on the brain tissue. It is obvious that the dog/cat is not alive at that stage. However, pets can be tested via a blood test and immunity against rabies can be confirmed. A titer of 0.5 iu/ml and more is protective against rabies.

11. My dog and cat was vaccinated during a rabies campaign, but I do not have documentary proof of that vaccination. What do I do should there be contact with rabid animals?

Blood can be drawn to determine the rabies titer. Depending on that titer, the state vet will decide what course of action to take.

12. I was bitten by a mongoose 2 weeks ago. What should I do?

If the mongoose is available and still healthy, no treatment for rabies is necessary. If the animal appears sick, submit the brain to the laboratory and treat the person. Should the mongoose not be available, assume it is positive for rabies and treat the person.

13. How long before an infection leads to death in an animal?

10 days

14. Is clinical rabies treatable in humans?

No. Life support measures may prolong the clinical course of the disease, but survival is unlikely, except on extremely rare occasions.

Expert advice on rabies, prophylaxis and medical issues:

National Institute for Communicable Disease
Hotline: 082 883 9920