

# ENDING DOG-MEDIATED HUMAN RABIES BY 2030: A ZAMBIAN PERSPECTIVE

## EDITORIAL

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*On 28th September 2018 each year, Zambia joins the world in commemorating World Rabies Day. The theme for this year is "Rabies: Share the message. Save a life". This year was no exception as veterinarians all across the country, with the coordination of the Veterinary Association of Zambia (VAZ) and in collaboration with the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock came out in numbers throughout the week leading up to 28th September to conduct rabies vaccination campaigns and sensitising communities on responsible dog ownership.*

**D**og-transmitted rabies is a zoonotic disease that causes the completely preventable death of an estimated 59,000 people every year [1]. Of those deaths, 24,000 occur in Africa where rabies has the highest per capita death rate [1]. In Zambia specifically, approximately 15,000 dog bite cases are recorded annually. Additionally, 50 humans die of rabies annually in Zambia. The per capita death rates (per 100,000 persons) is estimated to be 0.19 in Zambia [1].

As public health practitioners, we are collectively responsible for human deaths due to rabies given the preventability of rabies from the human side through post exposure vaccine and from the animal side through dog vaccinations. Studies have shown that an annual 70% vaccination

coverage in dog populations is an effective way to eliminate the disease from the dog and human population.

Zambia has demonstrated strong impetus to end dog-mediated human rabies by 2030. Under the able leadership of His Excellency Mr Edgar Chagwa Lungu, the ministries responsible for animal health and human health; Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock and Ministry of Health respectively, in 2018 came together in a rare One-Health approach to form the National Rabies Taskforce. The taskforce in Zambia has drawn all key ministries and

players to the table such as, the Ministry of Local Government, the University of Zambia etc. to ensure a well-coordinated approach to rabies control. Foremost, the taskforce seeks to draft the National Rabies Control Strategy, a document that will provide guidance on how rabies control will be achieved in the country.

Focal points for the ministries responsible for animal health and human health attended the 2nd full Pan-African Rabies Control Network (PARACON) in Johannesburg in early September this year.



**PARACON-WHO meeting**  
Johannesburg, South Africa  
12-14 September 2018

The 2nd PARACON meeting was a joint meeting with the World Health Organization (WHO), with participation from both Anglophone and Francophone countries of sub-Saharan Africa as well as several international experts from around the world [2]. The meeting brought to the fore new World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines regarding human rabies immunization [3]. The meeting also provided an opportunity for member states to share ideas on rabies control. The meeting provided an opportunity for countries to self-

exam where they are with regard to globally accepted steps in eradicating canine (dog)-mediated rabies.

Zambia is on course to eradicating rabies, and the key lies in responsible dog ownership. Rabies-prone dogs have been portrayed to be vicious looking dogs, however even puppies can transmit rabies, and because of the playful nature of puppies, children can get bitten and be put at risk of infection without guardians suspecting it. If we all do our part, by ensuring our pets have received all

necessary vaccinations, including rabies, and if we ensure our health facilities stock adequate pre and post exposure rabies vaccines for humans, we all together can end rabies in our communities even before 2030. Share the message. Save a life.

***DR Raymond Hamoonga (Rabies Focal Point, MoH-ZNPHI)***

# LIST OF REFERENCES

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