



Regional webinar on Rabies control in the East Mediterranean countries

28 –September 2021

Background: Rabies is one of the most deadly zoonotic diseases. It is listed among the World Organisation for Animal Health's (OIE) diseases under the category "multiple species diseases, infections and infestations" (Code chapter 8.14).

In spite of rapid advances in diagnostics, vaccine development and the application of novel technologies to control the disease, rabies remains a significant cause of deaths in human following exposure to rabid animals. The disease mainly affects poor rural communities where access to appropriate post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) is limited/neglected or non-existent. In contrast with many other diseases, the tools needed to eliminate rabies already exist.

The OIE, together with WHO, FAO and the Global Alliance for Rabies Control (GARC), joined efforts and formed the United Against Rabies Collaboration which elaborated the Global strategic plan to end human deaths from dog-mediated rabies by 2030.



As an output of this collaboration, aiming to reinforce and support countries on elaboration and implementation of the national strategies for rabies elimination, were made available various tools to support countries on the development of their national strategies and action plans.

An important prerequisite to achieve the objective of disease control is the ability of the Veterinary Services to institute and apply the international standards for the control of animal diseases and Zoonoses.

Since May 2019, OIE Standards on rabies include guidance for countries to apply, on a voluntary basis, for **the endorsement of their national control programmes for dog-mediated rabies.**

The regional representation for the Middle East, is organizing a one day event on the 28th of September 2021, to celebrate the World Rabies Day, and to start developing a regional monitoring approach for the elimination of Dog-mediated human rabies in the region.

Beside the experts from OIE HQ, Rachel Tidman and Marija Popovic, 5 East Mediterranean countries, were invited to give a summary on their surveillance plans for Rabies control.

Expected Outcomes

- Identifying the current national & regional situation for Rabies, and the progress made in Rabies control towards elimination of Dog-mediated Human Rabies
- The meeting will also assist the tripartite to further improve the UAR concept and assist countries to achieve the goal of zero cases by 2030.

Targeted countries: 5 ME countries: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria

Agenda of the meeting

- (I) Review of the Global eradication plan, (United Against Rabies)
- (II) Country reports on control of rabies, (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria)
- (III) OIE standards on application for endorsement of national control plan,
- (IV) Rabies situation in the Middle East and the way Forward.

Proceedings of the meeting:

Welcome address has been given by the Regional Representative, summarizing the objectives of the meeting as, from one part, a celebration of the World Rabies Day, and from other part to overview progress made in the control of Rabies in the region, and the challenges faced by the Official competent Authorities in the implementation of the control plan measures, especially during the period of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

United Against Rabies presentation by Rachel Tidman:

To build on the strong foundation laid out in the Global Strategic Plan to end human deaths from dog-mediated rabies by 2030 (*Zero by 30*), the Tripartite launched the United Against Rabies Forum in 2020. This inclusive network brings together stakeholders from diverse backgrounds to share knowledge, experience and ideas that will support countries and regions in developing and implementing effective rabies elimination programmes.

Working Group 1, entitled 'Effective use of vaccines, medicines, tools and technologies' are progressing activities that include the identification of minimum data elements to help countries strengthen surveillance systems, evaluating existing tools to provide guidance to countries, and mapping rabies activities to facilitate coordination and assist stakeholders in assessing progress and identifying gaps.

Working Group 2, entitled 'Strategic and Operational support' has developed a National Strategic Plan template and are progressing a monitoring and evaluation framework and a roadmap that provides guidance to countries. This group is also working to identify the main constraints that prevent countries from progressing towards elimination.

Working Group 3 will be established soon and will focus on building advocacy and resource mobilisation strategies.

The UAR Forum website, which is currently in development, provide a central platform where stakeholders can easily access key resources while fostering networks and relationships for the sharing of knowledge and experience.

The Working Groups will provide updates on their activities and progress to the wider rabies community in the second UAR Forum Stakeholder event which will consist of three virtual webinars, taking place on 27 September, 4 October, and 11 October 2021. These webinars will also allow stakeholders to identify priority activities for the UAR Forum to progress in the coming 12 months.

RESPONSIBILITIES AND COMPETENCIES



Countries Presentations:

1- Egypt: (General Organisation of the veterinary services)

The presenter exposed the number of bitten animals and vaccinated animals during the past years, as well as the number of rabid animals, especially in dogs and cows.

He summarized on the national strategy for rabies eradication as been developed in cooperation with different stakeholders and international organizations to eliminate dog mediated rabies and prevent human cases. The strategy is based on working to decrease the stray dog population, vaccination, education of dog owners and notification to OIE.

2- Iraq: Dr. Thamer Hamza

Since decade, unstable situation in the country have had an impact on disease incidence, and control in Iraq. Official health reports demonstrated an increase in human rabies cases countrywide, particularly in Baghdad, with a threefold increase between 2001 and 2010. annual numbers of reported human cases were lower in the period between 2012 and 2017 than prior to 2010, human cases continue. There was a distinct gender and age bias among human cases with nine cases in males for every one female and twice as many cases in children than adults. The strategy to control rabies in Iraq is to vaccinate farm animals at the site outbreak occurrence.

The Authorities are facing lack of vaccine availability, and in laboratory capacity for confirmation of rabies cases, added to gaps in surveillance and reporting procedures.

3- Jordan: Dr. Rachel Dodeen

Rabies is selected as an important disease within the One Health Zoonotic Diseases Program (OHZDP) Dr. Dodeen described the situation in Jordan during the last decade and enumerating several initiatives to control the disease such as the ABC project (Animal Birth Control). Regulations are set by the competent Authorities to control the situation, but low progress in the implementation has been noted, due mainly to the poor communication with stakeholders, added to insufficient human resources, and specific funds for implementing the rabies control programme (vaccination campaign(s), laboratory support, logistical support and awareness campaigns, etc.).

4- Lebanon: (Directorate of Animal Resources)

Lebanon reported a special increase in Post Exposure Treatment (PET) in humans in the last years which is an all too heavy financial burden for the Public Health Ministry.

In general, vaccination of owned dogs is compulsory and carried out directly or under supervision of the Veterinary Services. Particular difficulties to access suspected high incidence areas, such as border zones were identified as one of the problems that may lead additionally to the observed resurgence of rabies in the country

The surveillance plan in Lebanon comprises five objectives: 1- One health multisector taskforce strengthened on dog-mediated human rabies elimination; 2- Conduct of Rabies Awareness education, 3-Implementation of mass vaccination campaigns; 4- establishment and strengthening of a Rabies surveillance system; 5- Improving research activities.

The country faced several challenges, mainly the economic crisis since 2019, the COVID situation and the disastrous blast of Beirut harbor.

5- Syria: Dr Mohamed Abboud, Ministry of Agriculture and Agrerian Reform

The last case of rabies recorded in Syria was reported to the OIE in 2019. There is no official statistics on the number of stray dogs, and there is no official statistics on the number of wild animals such as foxes and wolves.....

Stray dogs spread in rural areas in large numbers and may reach cities in some cases. Owned dogs are vaccinated by private veterinary clinics, as well as some cats, especially those who may travel outside the country.

There is a laboratory to diagnose the disease in the Ministry of Agriculture and more than one laboratory in the Ministry of Health, but lack of equipment and diagnostic materials.

There are awareness programs implemented in the extension units at the village level for livestock breeders. Some NGO's are dealing with pets for animal welfare practices.

Difficulties and challenges

- a. There is no clear program to control stray dogs and wildlife, especially budget.
- b. Lack of serums and vaccines for the treatment of humans, beside unavailability of special diagnostic materials to diagnose the disease.
- c. Lack of rabies vaccines for animals imported by the private sector with high cost.
- d. Lack of awareness among some pet owners.

Suggestions and solutions

- i. Formation of a higher committee that includes all partners in the public and private sectors
- ii. Develop a clear strategy to control, vaccinate and eliminate the disease in line with the global strategy to eliminate the disease by 2030
- iii. Securing the necessary support from international organizations and bodies working in this field to promote awareness and secure diagnostic supplies, vaccines and serums.

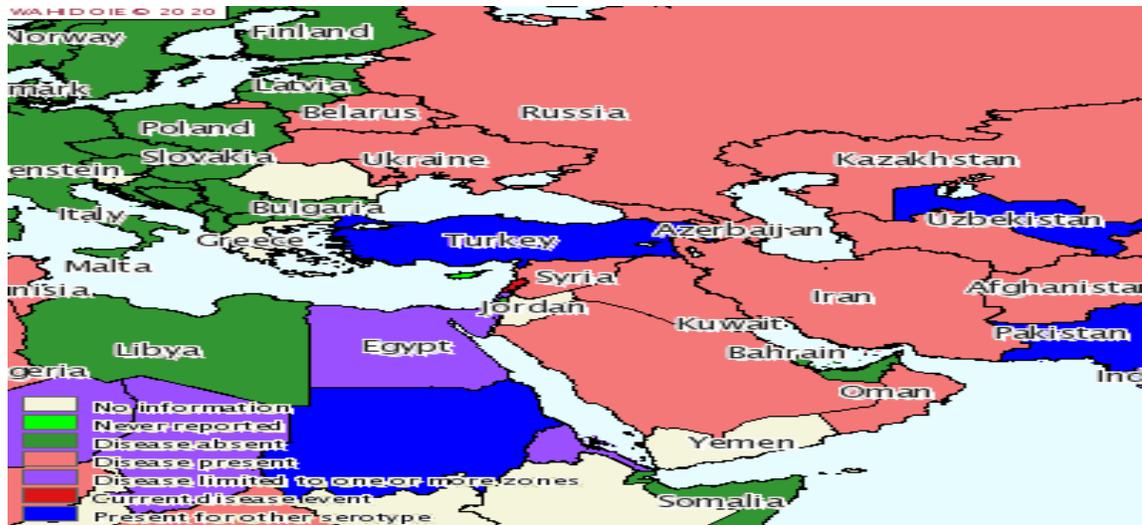
6- The endorsement of official control programmes for dog-mediated rabies: Marija Popovic

Based on the provisions of Chapter 8.14. of the Terrestrial Animal Health Code (Terrestrial Code), OIE Members can, on a voluntary basis, apply for the endorsement of their official control programmes for dog-mediated rabies by the OIE. To receive such endorsement, Members need to collect evidence that their programmes comply with OIE International Standards (Article 8.14.11. of the Terrestrial Code). The overall objective of an OIE endorsed official control programme for dog-mediated rabies is to progressively improve the dog-mediated rabies situation in the country and eventually be able to make a self-declaration in accordance with Chapter 1.6. as a country free from dog-mediated rabies. It is important to note that the official control programme should be applicable to the entire country even if certain measures are directed towards defined subpopulations only. The application for the OIE endorsement of an official control programme for dog-mediated rabies could be submitted when the measures have already been implemented through the programme. The application should be submitted in accordance with the Standard Operating Procedure for official recognition of animal health status and for the endorsement of official control programmes of Members, based on the model of the relevant questionnaire available on the OIE website.

Having an OIE-endorsed control programme is a key asset for national Veterinary Authorities, as it helps them advocate governments for increasing support and prioritising investments in rabies control, a fundamental step to further implement their programmes.

7- Rabies situation in the Middle East and the way forward: Ghazi Yehia

In the Middle East, most reports clearly showed that there was a suspicion of severe underreporting, both, in human and in animal cases. Rabies seems to occur mainly in rural areas, where more vulnerable populations are located.



In the MENA region, rabies is mainly urban, transmitted to humans by free roaming dogs, the population density of which is highly correlated to the evolution of enzootics and possible epizootic outbreaks.

More than 50% of the free-roaming dogs are under one year age. The density of the stray dog population is around 0.6 to 1.5/km². in urban area and more than 2.6 in rural areas. (80% Rabid dog's cases).

National strategies include vaccination, control of stray dog populations and raising awareness among at risk human populations. These strategies are partially implemented (lack of Funds, human resources, lack of coordination).

The presentation calls for a regional strategy in line with the OIE initiative on “Rabies ends here” (Educate, Vaccinate, Eliminate). Such strategy should be based on a collaborative describing roles and responsibilities of the different concerned agencies and identifying infrastructure needed for surveillance and prevention added to a robust legal framework and transparent reporting and notifications.





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