



## **Rabies and your pets**

Rabies is a viral born disease that can affect all mammals including dogs, cats and us humans. Unfortunately there is no cure for rabies as yet but a good vaccination program for your dog and cat can help to limit the severity and spread of this deadly disease. The virus is contained in the salivary glands and saliva of infected animals and is transmitted when an infected animal bites a non-infected animal. There has to be a break of the skin for the virus to enter and begin a new infection in a new host. The progression of the disease can be very slow with often long incubation periods this usually depends on how far the bite wound is from the central nervous system, some of the clinical sings in dogs and cats are as follows.

### **Dogs:**

- **Change in behaviour including aggression**
- **Indiscriminate biting of strange things**
- **Exaggerated response to sound and light**
- **Aimless wondering**
- **Drooling saliva**
- **Inability to swallow (bone in throat)**
- **Muscle spasms and convulsions**



### **Cats:**

- **Aggressiveness**
- **Uncoordinated, strange postures**
- **Vocalisation**
- **Attacking unprovoked**
- **Salivation**



If you notice any of these symptoms in your dog or cat consult a veterinarian immediately. Should you approach a dog which appears to have something stuck in its throat rather try to contact the owners or call your local SPCA or take the dog to the vet if it is safe to do so.

### **Treatment and prevention**

There is currently no known treatment for animals infected with rabies. There is how ever an effective vaccine that can be used to provide some pre-exposure immunity against the virus. All young animals from the age of three months should be vaccinated this should be followed by a booster vaccination between 2 and 9 months later. Thereafter an annual booster vaccination should be given every year lifelong to maintain immunity. Should your dog be bitten by another animal suspected of having rabies or is known to have rabies you should present your animal to your veterinarian immediately even if it has previously been vaccinated. Please also remember that South Africa is considered a rabies endemic area and

all dogs and cats are required to be vaccinated by law and should always travel with a valid rabies vaccination certificate.

### **Rabies in humans**

Since us humans are warm blooded animals we are also able to contract the rabies virus, there is also no known cure for rabies in humans. If one is ever bitten by a rabid dog or any other animal suspected of having rabies needs to be seen immediately by a medical doctor, at home the bite wound should be allowed to bleed and should be rinsed profusely with water and cleaned with an germicidal agent. Treatment for humans usually involves several vaccinations from the day that the patient extending several days thereafter, these patients are also given anti-rabies immunoglobulin treatment to help prevent the virus from replicating and progressing further.



If there are any questions relating to rabies virus its symptoms or vaccinations and treatments please do not hesitate to contact your nearest veterinarian or local SPCA.