



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



Standing Group of Experts on Rabies in Europe

under the GF-TADs umbrella

2nd meeting (SGE RAB2)
Teleconference, 13 July 2020

Recommendations

Considering that:

- Rabies eradication is a priority for Europe;
- Experience in Europe shows that rabies can be eradicated if oral rabies vaccination campaigns (ORV), coupled with robust surveillance, are implemented consistently, twice a year, over a period of several years, including a number of years after the last confirmed case of rabies;
- The regional situation is improving as the number of cases has dramatically decreased in the last years;
- A new case detected in Bosnia and Herzegovina in June 2020, close to the border with Serbia and the location of the last Serbian case, threatens the positive evolution in the region, after 6 years without cases in Bosnia and Herzegovina and 2 years without cases in Serbia;
- Confirmed cases in Romania are also of concern and should be carefully investigated and followed;
- Although there was no sound surveillance data, some countries in the region have already ceased the ORV in recent years;
- For autumn 2020 and spring and autumn 2021, all countries/territories in the region have already planned or, at least, have the intention to continue vaccinating, if funds are available;
- Surveillance remains in certain countries the weakest point of their rabies eradication programmes, particularly as regards the testing of indicator¹ animals for rabies detection (passive surveillance); as a result, in some countries/territories, the number of animals sampled and tested is very low and this compromises eradication;
- It is necessary to safeguard and consolidate the achievements on rabies control, accomplished so far by the combined efforts of all countries/territories, in the region of South East Europe.

¹ Suspect or indicator animals are animals that show clinical signs or abnormal behaviour suggestive of rabies, animals found dead, road-kills and animals involved in human exposure

Recommendations on rabies vaccination

1. ORV should be implemented for at least 6 years and not be ceased earlier than two years after the last confirmed case of rabies, provided there was sufficient and adequate surveillance in place. The situation in bordering countries/territories should be taken into account.
2. Coordination of ORV amongst bordering countries/territories in terms of timing and vaccination areas is of paramount importance to eradicate the disease. This is particularly relevant in areas close to the international borders where the adequate coverage of the areas with vaccine baits might be challenging.
3. Countries should share in advance information on the planned ORV (territory covered, number of baits) together with a timely communication of the beginning and ending date via electronic exchange under GFTADS.
4. The decision on phasing out the ORV should be coordinated, in particular by the GFTADS SGE rabies, at regional level in order to achieve the elimination of rabies in the region. Premature cessation of vaccination in a single country/territory might jeopardise rabies eradication in the whole region of South-East Europe and nullify all efforts and resources invested so far.
5. Reoccurrences of the disease, as the case recently recorded in Bosnia and Herzegovina, underline the need to continue implementing ORV until robust surveillance data can demonstrate freedom from rabies and the coordinated decision on phasing out is taken.
6. Arrangements at national or regional level should be in place to ensure supply of vaccines for emergency vaccination in case of re-emergence, to ensure timely response to rabies recurrence.

Recommendations on surveillance

7. To improve surveillance, it is important to raise disease awareness amongst the competent authorities, hunters, farmers and all other stakeholders involved.
8. Increased surveillance around any new cases is of paramount importance to estimate the extension of the outbreak and take an informed decision of the area to be vaccinated.
9. All countries/territories in the region should regularly share epidemiological information with GFTADS members (e.g. through ADNS and WAHIS), to allow an informed decision of the areas to be vaccinated and regional coordination of rabies measures. Bilateral or multilateral discussions at regional level are encouraged, so that everyone benefits from mutual experiences.
10. Robust surveillance data is essential to decide the vaccination area.
11. Competent authorities should designate a point of contact for rabies to enhance coordination and exchange of information.