



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

Report

Summary

The second meeting of the Standing Group of Experts on Rabies (SGE RAB2) was organised as a virtual meeting with over 50 participants present. The meeting objective was to verify the possibility to phase out **oral rabies** vaccination of wild carnivore in the region.

Member Countries provided extremely interesting reports on their epidemiological situation, activities and plans in terms of oral vaccination against rabies. Following healthy and transparent discussions on the way forward, the consequent recommendations imply that vaccination is still required in view of the recent outbreaks and the insufficient passive surveillance. Several countries' actions depend on the insufficient funding available and the European Commission is willing to continue to provide adequate help.

Minutes

Opening Remarks

The Europe GF-TADs SGE Rabies Secretariat welcomed the participants and in particular the European Commission (EC) and FAO with whom the meeting was organised. Present were all the SGE members, EC, FAO and OIE Officials from HQ and Regional and Subregional Representations as well several countries representatives as observers for a total of over 50 participants (see the full [list of participants](#))

Dr Plavsic, Head of the OIE Regional Representation in Moscow, Secretariat of the Regional Steering Committee of the GF-TADs for Europe, informed about two very important possibilities under the OIE capacity building process for improvement of animal health in Member Countries:

- i) OIE endorsement of the national control programme for Rabies and
- ii) Self-declarations of Rabies freedom.

1. **Endorsement of the national control programme:** *The endorsement of an official dog-mediated rabies control programme by the OIE was adopted in 2018. The recommendation aims to offer OIE Members a tool to organize and improve actions at the national level and enhance Members' capacity to advocate for engagement and funds.*

The first List of Members with an endorsed official control programme for dog-mediated rabies is expected to be adopted by the World Assembly of the Delegates of the OIE in May 2021, but this is contingent on countries submitting their dossiers before September, 18th 2020. Therefore, the countries are invited to prepare their documentation, and to apply for the OIE endorsement of their national Rabies control programme if relevant.

2. **Self-declarations of Rabies freedom:** *In accordance with the provisions of the Terrestrial Animal Health Code on diseases self-declaration (Chapter 1.6) and relevant chapter for Rabies (chapter 8.14), OIE Members may wish to self-declare the freedom of their country, zone or compartment from Rabies. Publications of self-declaration of disease freedom are handled by the OIE in an objective and transparent manner, governed by the [Standard Operating Procedures](#). The web page for [Self-declared disease status](#) contains examples of Members with self-declarations for rabies (in archives).*

Dr Bernard Van Goethem, the President of the Regional Steering Committee of the GF-TADs for Europe, welcomed the participants. He thanked Croatia which had originally offered to host the event. He reminded that the **initial scope of the meeting is to discuss the phasing out oral vaccination against rabies in wild carnivores** in SGE RAB member countries.

Updates from the member countries of the SGE RAB2

Albania

- No rabies case since 2014 (1 fox), near the Kosovo border
- Oral vaccination campaigns on foxes conducted twice a year since 2014, except in 2019. In 2020, the vaccination is postponed to November
- No passive surveillance.
- Plans for 2021-2022: bi-annual oral vaccination planned, with active surveillance

Bosnia and Herzegovina

- No rabies case in human since 1991, in wild animals since 2013 and no imported rabies. Domestic rabies reoccurrence confirmed in May 2020 in a non-vaccinated dog in Srebrenica, near the border with Serbia (last occurrence was in 2014)
- Oral vaccination campaigns, covering the whole territory, are regularly conducted twice a year from autumn 2011 to spring 2018. Last vaccination of foxes in 2017. No possibility in 2019 because of tender not completed, but the 2020 campaign is planned
- Plans for 2021-2022: for the whole country, spring oral vaccination planned, with passive and active surveillance. No vaccination and only passive surveillance planned in 2022.

Bulgaria

- Last rabies case in 2010 in domestic animals and in 2014 for wildlife, more than 10 years ago for human
- Bi-annual oral vaccination campaigns, covering the regions 50 km from North, West and South borders
- Plans for 2021-2022: Oral vaccination planned in 2021, with passive and active surveillance in 2021 and 2022

Croatia

- Last rabies case in human in 1964. 1 dog and 1 horse in 2013 and last wildlife case in 2014 (1 fox). Last imported case in human in 1995
- Bi-annual oral vaccination campaigns since 2011, covering the whole country, except Adriatic islands, since autumn 2013
- Plans for 2021-2022: Oral vaccination planned in 2021 (whole country in 2021, buffer zone near Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia in 2022). Passive and active surveillance in 2021 and 2022 in the whole country

Greece

- Last case in animals (wildlife and domestic) in 2014. In humans reported in 1970
- The vaccination began in 2013
- Plans for 2021-2022: Redefinition of immunization zone near bordering countries as part of the future campaigns focusing on targeted areas

Hungary

- Last rabies case in human in 1994. Last animal cases (1 dog and 1 horse) in 2017 and last wildlife case in 2017 (1 fox).
- Bi-annual oral vaccination campaigns since 2010, covering the regions 50 km wide along East and South borders. Hungary considers stopping vaccination in western part of the country, close to countries without cases (Croatia and Slovenia)
- Plans for 2021-2022: Oral vaccination planned in 2021 and 2022 along the borders with non-free countries for rabies. Passive surveillance in the whole country. Active surveillance in the vaccination areas

UNMIK/Kosovo¹

- No rabies case ever declared neither in animals, nor in human and no imported case
- Bi-annual oral vaccination campaigns in the whole country since 2010 (missing 2015, 2016, 2017 and spring 2012)
- Passive surveillance only conducted in 2017
- Plans for 2021-2022: Vaccination still uncertain. The surveillance will remain as passive

Montenegro

- Last rabies case in human in 1974. Last animal cases in 2011 (wildlife) and 2012 (1 cat). No imported case ever reported
- Bi-annual oral vaccination campaigns in the whole country since autumn 2011 (missing autumn 2015)
- Plans for 2021-2022: An oral vaccination for the whole country is deemed necessary, due to the epidemiological situation in the neighboring countries, but depends on an external financial support. Passive surveillance will cover the whole country. Active surveillance will be concentrated in hunting grounds, during the hunting season

¹ References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999)

North Macedonia

- Last rabies case in human in 1976. Last animal cases in 2012 (domestic and wildlife). No imported case ever reported.
- Regular bi-annual oral vaccination campaigns in the whole country since 2011. No plan to vaccinate wild animals
- Plans for 2021-2022: No oral vaccination planned to be continued. Passive surveillance will cover the whole country. No active surveillance planned. A passive surveillance of dogs will be maintained, included in the annual animal health clinical surveillance of farms.

Romania

- Last rabies case in human in 2012. Last cases in wildlife in 2019. 1 case in dog in 2020 and 1 cow early July 2020, close to Moldova. No information on imported cases.
- Oral vaccination campaigns since 2013, bi-annual and in the whole country since 2015 (not implemented in 2019).
- Plans for 2021-2022: bi-annual oral vaccination planned to be continued in the whole country, associated with passive and active surveillance. Need for a tender procedure for the vaccines.

Serbia

- Last rabies case in domestic animals in 2012. Last cases in wildlife in 2018. No imported animal case and no information on imported human cases.
- Regular bi-annual oral vaccination campaigns since autumn 2010, covering the whole country. No campaign could be implemented in 2020. Financial difficulties to conduct the last campaign.
- Plans for 2021-2022: bi-annual oral vaccination is planned to be continued in the whole country, given an external funding is received (requested to EU).

Slovakia

- Last human case in 1990, in 2005 in domestic animals and 2015 in wildlife. No data available on possible imported cases.
- Regular bi-annual oral vaccination campaigns since 2010 in the East part of the country.
- No positive cases since 2015.
- Plans for 2021-2022: bi-annual oral vaccination, together with active and passive surveillance is planned to be continued.

Slovenia

- Last human case in 1950, in 2010 in domestic animals and 2013 in wildlife. No data available on possible imported cases.
- Regular bi-annual oral vaccination campaigns since 2010 in the southern part of the country (a 50 km belt along the border with Croatia).
- No positive cases since 2013.
- Plans for 2021-2022: the country will concentrate on passive surveillance, without any vaccination campaigns or active surveillance planned.

Requests of clarifications on the data provided, the type of surveillance in certain areas especially where the recent outbreak took place in Bosnia and Herzegovina, near the border with Serbia and several interventions were carried out by most of the members countries.

Main constraints identified

- It was highlighted that to date there is not enough passive surveillance throughout the region, which is crucial, as part of the overall surveillance, for disease eradication.
- Based on the data available and the recent outbreaks, the planned phasing out of the vaccination should be postponed. The oral rabies vaccination campaigns are still needed and will be carried out by almost all countries
- For continuing with oral rabies vaccination campaigns and rabies surveillance, it is essential to ensure necessary financial support to member countries. Dr Van Goethem and the Representative of DG Near from the European Commission will strive to provide the necessary help.

The comments are reflected in the available recommendations as these were first provided by the Secretariat and then based on the written comment received, further elaborated

Recommendations

The SGE RAB secretariat presented the draft recommendations proposed for adoption by the SGE RAB2. The draft includes 8 different recommendations covering rabies vaccination and surveillance. The Secretariat of the GF-TADs will circulate the draft recommendations with possible comments expected until 17th July.

Closing remarks - Future steps

The SGE RAB will meet again next year, with more participating countries if needed.

NB: all presentations of the SGE RAB2 are available on the webpage of the [GF-TADs SGE RAB webpage](#) dedicated to Rabies.