



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



Standing Group of Experts on Rabies in Europe under the GF-TADs umbrella

3rd meeting (SGE RAB3) Teleconference, 13 December 2021

Conclusions and recommendations

Considering that:

- Rabies eradication is a priority for Europe as a region of 53 Member Countries;
- 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 when strong passive surveillance to be implemented;
- The epidemiological situation in Europe is progressively improving as the number of cases has dramatically decreased in the last years;
- Although there was no sound surveillance data to provide scientific basis to confirm absence of rabies virus, some countries in the region have already ceased ORV in recent years;
- In certain countries of the region, surveillance remains the weakest point of their rabies eradication programmes, particularly as regards the testing of indicator¹ animals for rabies detection (passive or general surveillance); as a result, in some countries/territories, the number of animals sampled and tested is very low and this compromises eradication efforts and overall success achieved during last decade.
- There is a non-negligible administrative burden of implementation of ORV and surveillance, including budget allocation and procurement of vaccines and diagnostics, and services for oral vaccine distribution, which is often managed by different authorities or stakeholders in respective countries.
- 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

General conclusions and recommendations

1. To uphold coordination of measures between countries in the region, including on ORV and surveillance, and dialogue between CVOs and animal health officers from Veterinary Authorities,

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

experts and representatives of GF-TADs, and therefore, consider organising the next SGE meeting in face-to-face format, if the pandemic situation allows, in Brussels or at another venue in the region.

2. To task SGE Secretariat (OIE Regional Representation in Moscow) to continue regional coordination on Rabies in the region of Europe, to monitor the implementation and effectiveness of the multiannual eradication program in the Balkans, in collaboration with the European Commission and SGE Members, and promote any actions relevant for rabies eradication, with possible support of rabies experts from the existing EU funded project for Western Balkans.
3. To develop pathways to facilitate sustainable planning and implementation of rabies eradication programmes, including administrative (procurement, capacity building) and in-field (aerial and/or manual baits distribution) activities. SGE members should continue building own capacities to implement these activities in close collaboration with relevant national authorities, and with EU Delegations in respective countries when relevant, with a view to start with these activities well in advance and to implement a strong project management prior to and during their implementation. The experts involved in the existing EU funded project for Western Balkans may also provide guidance in this regard.
4. To promote regular and transparent epidemiological information sharing from countries/territories in the region with other GF-TADs members (e.g. disease notification through ADIS and WAHIS) and stimulate cross-border coordination of rabies control measures.
5. To open the membership of the Standing Group of Experts on Rabies in Europe to other countries in the region of Europe where the epidemiological situation has deteriorated or the risk of spreading of rabies has increased.

Recommendations on oral vaccination campaigns against rabies

6. To ensure ORV to be implemented for at least 6 years and to be ceased not earlier than two years after the last confirmed case of rabies, provided that appropriate passive surveillance is performed in accordance with standards. The situation in bordering countries/territories should be taken into account before any decision in this regard.
7. To consider phasing out of vaccination only after careful assessment and within a regional perspective, as premature cease of vaccination in a country/territory might jeopardise rabies eradication in the whole region of South-East Europe.
8. To secure adequate coordination of ORV amongst bordering countries/territories in terms of timing and vaccination areas 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.
9. To draw up specific arrangements at national level for the supply of vaccines for emergency vaccination to ensure timely response to rabies recurrence.

Recommendations on rabies surveillance

10. To step up efforts on rabies surveillance as it remains a key point for rabies eradication programmes, particularly passive surveillance² and appears to be still a weak point in some

² Detection of indicator animals for rabies detection.

countries or areas where the number of animals sampled and tested is very low. Hence, to improve surveillance, it is important to raise awareness, allocate resources, implement procedures and improve coordination amongst the competent authorities, hunters, farmers and other stakeholders involved. EU funded project(s) may also be important tool(s) to support SGE Members in designing proper sample size and providing operating procedures/guidance to improve national surveillance programmes. In the case of budgetary constraints, number of samples for active surveillance could be reduced, in order to increase number of samples for passive surveillance.

11. To increase surveillance in proximity of any new cases to appropriately estimate the extension of the outbreak and take an informed decision of the area to be vaccinated.
12. To ensure greater coordination of surveillance activities for Rabies with activities implemented for other TADs (e.g. ASF, avian influenza) to ensure cost-effective and complementary work, particularly if these actions involve coordination with hunting associations and other stakeholders, training and awareness raising campaigns.