



GF-TADs

GLOBAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE
PROGRESSIVE CONTROL OF
TRANSBOUNDARY ANIMAL DISEASES



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



World Organisation
for Animal Health
Founded as OIE

Standing Group of Experts on Rabies in Europe

under the GF-TADs umbrella

6th meeting (SGE RAB6)

Brussels, Belgium

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Conclusions and recommendations

Considering that:

- Rabies eradication is a GF-TADs and One Health priority for Europe as a region of 53 Member Countries.
- Experience in Europe shows that wildlife rabies can be eradicated if oral rabies vaccination campaigns (ORV), coupled with robust surveillance, are implemented consistently, twice a year, over several consecutive years, including at least two years after the last confirmed case of rabies when strong passive surveillance is implemented and taking also into consideration rabies situation in adjacent areas.
- The epidemiological situation mainly in South-East Europe is progressively improving as the number of cases has dramatically decreased in the last years, except in few areas.
- 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 low and this compromises eradication efforts and overall success achieved during the 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.

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.

- It is necessary to safeguard and consolidate the achievements on rabies control, accomplished so far by the combined efforts of all sectors in all countries/territories, in the region of South-East Europe.

General conclusions and recommendations

The Standing Group of Experts on Rabies for Europe recommends:

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, experts and representatives of GF-TADs, and therefore, to continue organizing one meeting of the SGE on Rabies every year, preferably face-to-face. Different regional/sub-regional initiatives can also be considered to consolidate the coordination, such as the Animal Disease Eradication Western Balkans (ADEWB) initiatives.
2. To task SGE Secretariat (WOAH Sub-Regional Representation in Brussels) to continue regional coordination on Rabies in Europe, to facilitate monitoring of the implementation of eradication programs by Members, in collaboration with FAO, the European Commission and SGE Members, and promote any actions relevant for rabies eradication.
3. To develop pathways to facilitate sustainable, and if possible medium to long-term (e.g. multi-year), planning and implementation of rabies eradication programmes, including administrative (procurement, capacity building) and disease control activities (e.g. preventive vaccinations, including ORV, surveillance, awareness raising). SGE members should continue building their own capacities to implement these activities in close collaboration with relevant national authorities within the GF-TADs and One Health frameworks, 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.
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) within the GF-TADs and One Health frameworks and stimulate cross-border coordination of rabies control measures.
5. To include Poland, Ukraine and Moldova as full members of the SGE on Rabies, and as such to ensure their participation in future Rabies SGE meetings to share their experience and receive relevant guidance.
6. To continue monitoring the epidemiological situation in the region of Europe to be ready to open the membership of the SGE on Rabies in Europe to other countries where the epidemiological situation in wildlife has deteriorated or the risk of spreading of rabies has increased, and to continue inviting observers from other countries and the One Health framework organizations.
7. To foster the active engagement of experts participating in the ongoing EU-funded project for the Western Balkans (ADEWB II), or other projects, with a view to bring substantial technical support, expertise in various areas, data analysis capabilities, administrative procedures, design of surveillance and rabies control programmes, and other related aspects, as all of which will greatly enrich and improve SGE performances.

Recommendations on oral vaccination campaigns against rabies (ORV)

8. To continue with ORV efforts and ensure it is implemented twice a year for at least six consecutive years and not ceased earlier than two years after the last confirmed case of rabies (golden standard), provided that appropriate passive surveillance and monitoring of vaccination are performed in accordance with international standards and/or best practices.
9. To consider phasing out of vaccination only after careful risk assessment (importance of surveillance data) and within a regional perspective, as the situation in bordering countries/territories should be considered before any decision in this regard due to the fact that a premature cease of vaccination in a country/territory might jeopardise rabies eradication in the whole region of South-East Europe.
10. To secure and strengthen adequate coordination of ORV amongst bordering countries/territories in terms of timing and vaccination areas, as it 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.
11. To draw up specific arrangements at national level for the sustainable and mid- to long-term supply of vaccines to ensure timely response to any evolution in the rabies situation, including for emergency vaccination in case of rabies resurgence.

Recommendations on rabies surveillance

12. To step up efforts on rabies surveillance as it remains a key point for rabies eradication programmes and recall the importance of passive surveillance² which appears to be still a weak point in some countries or areas where the number of animals sampled and tested is low.
13. To boost awareness raising efforts, amongst competent authorities, hunters, farmers and all other stakeholders involved as a good tool to improve passive surveillance, by allocating sufficient resources, providing trainings, implementing procedures and improving coordination amongst these stakeholders based on GF-TADs and One Health approaches. 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, all efforts should be focused to increase number of samples for passive surveillance irrespective of the level of active surveillance (monitoring of ORV).
14. 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.
15. To ensure greater coordination of surveillance activities for Rabies with activities implemented for other TADs (e.g. ASF, HPAI) to ensure cost-effective and complementary work, particularly if these actions involve coordination with hunting associations and other stakeholders, training and awareness raising campaigns, including towards the general public.

² Detection of indicator animals for rabies detection.

16. To ensure the maximum realization of plans for surveillance for rabies in wildlife and domestic animals in the current context of habitat disruption, migration of humans and animals (both wildlife and pets accompanying their owners) due to the war of aggression against Ukraine.
17. To call for regular epidemiological information sharing with members of the GF-TADs framework and other parties within the One Health Framework to allow an informed decision of the areas to be vaccinated and regional coordination of rabies control measures