



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



Standing Group of Experts on rabies for Europe under the GF-TADs umbrella

First meeting (SGE rabies 1) – Brussels, 13 February 2019

Recommendations

Considering that:

- Rabies eradication is a priority for Europe; for the EU the objective is to have it eradicated by 2020.
- Experience in Europe shows that rabies can be eradicated if oral rabies vaccination campaigns (ORV) coupled with robust surveillance are implemented regularly.
- The regional situation in the Balkans is improving as the number of cases has dramatically decreased in the last years following the implementation of ORV funded by the European Union.

Recommendations on rabies vaccination

1. ORV programmes should be conducted for a period long enough, at least as defined in point 2, a large scale approach being the most effective strategy.
2. ORV should be at least implemented for 6 years and be ceased not earlier than two years after the last confirmed case of rabies. The situation of bordering countries should be taken into account.
3. Coordination of ORV amongst bordering countries in terms of timing and vaccinated areas is of paramount importance to eradicate the disease. This is particularly relevant in areas close to the international borders where the adequate coverage with vaccine baits of the areas might be challenging. The national competent authorities should guarantee appropriate coverage of the territory of the country relevant for the distribution of vaccine baits, with emphasis on the bordering line with neighbouring country(ies).
4. Phasing out of vaccination should be carefully assessed and considered in a regional perspective: premature vaccination stop might lead to the failure of rabies eradication in the whole area.
5. In the last steps of eradication of rabies in the region (SE Europe), emergency vaccine bank should be created at international, regional or national level to allow countries that have already ceased the ORV to quickly respond to possible rabies re-incursions and to limit further spread of disease.

Recommendations on surveillance

6. A country should not be considered as free of rabies unless robust surveillance data indicates the absence of the disease.

7. Robust surveillance data should only include passive surveillance data obtained from suspect or indicator animals (i.e. susceptible animals that show clinical signs or abnormal behaviour suggestive of rabies, animal found dead, road kills and animals involved in human exposure).
8. Bordering countries should share regularly formal epidemiological information in order to make an informed decision of the areas to be vaccinated.
9. Surveillance systems are a weak point of the rabies eradication programmes in certain areas. The number of animals tested for rabies does not allow to fully assess the situation. Therefore, competent authorities should conduct actions such as raising awareness campaigns and funding the collection of samples from suspect or indicator animals to increase the number of animals tested to rule out rabies.

General recommendations for South East Europe

10. Surveillance needs to be increased substantially to improve the knowledge of the rabies situation. In the meanwhile, well-coordinated oral rabies vaccination campaigns should continue in the whole region as a midterm strategy.
11. To facilitate the coordination, EU financial support including in the framework of crossborder and regional initiatives, should be requested by the countries particularly for 2019 and 2020.
12. Following the 2019 campaigns, a new meeting of SGE rabies should be convened to follow up the epidemiological situation and should include scientific advice on the surveillance from reference laboratories.
13. Competent authorities should designate a focal rabies contact point to enhance coordination and exchange of information.