

CASE REPORT (5) – NORTH AFRICA EPIDEMIOLOGICAL FACTORS AND CONTROL OF RABIES IN NORTH AFRICA

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Rabies should be considered as a very serious public health concern with high economical consequences in North Africa; each year, around 100 human and few thousands of animal rabies cases are reported. The burden of rabies falls mostly on poor rural communities and children in particular. The dog remains the most important vector and reservoir of the disease and is responsible for almost all the reported human cases.

The declared rabies figures are rather underestimates in North Africa. Lack of laboratory diagnosis facilities and logistics to transfer suspect samples, in addition to the lack of local population involvement are responsible of the disease underreporting.

Several eradication programs have been conducted in different countries but they have only limited success in the control of rabies in urban areas without eliminating the disease. Several reasons may explain the difficulty in achieving effective canine rabies control: the shortage in financial and/or human resources; the inaccessibility to a large fraction of the dog population, the high turnover rate of dog populations; and the non respect of the vaccine cold chain.

Any attempt to control rabies in North Africa can only be through canine mass vaccination with accompanying measures such:

- Generalizing laboratory confirmation of suspected rabies cases and standardization of laboratory diagnosis techniques.
- Increasing public awareness towards rabies for a better adherence of the local populations to rabies vaccination campaigns.
- Sensitizing human and animal health professionals.
- Improving knowledge on the size of dog population and its dynamic.
- Assessment of the vaccination coverage.

