



DOG BITE PREVENTION FOR RABIES ELIMINATION

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BIOGRAPHY

Mr Daniel Stewart has an extensive career in animal welfare and an advanced diploma in companion animal behaviour. He joined the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Rabies Elimination Project in 2009 to run the welfare, research and training component of the project. His expertise has been utilised by several organisations globally, with the emphasis being on dog population management, rabies elimination programmes and animal handling training.

SUMMARY

Despite the ancient symbiotic relationship between dogs and humans, conflict between the two is inevitable and dog bites are as old as the relationship itself. Biting is usually driven by natural instincts, but sometimes a disease such as rabies plays a role.

With society's understandable fear of rabies, and 99% of human rabies deaths resulting from dog-mediated rabies, treatment of dog bites has become both necessary and common. However, large numbers of unnecessary treatments are administered annually to ensure that a small percentage of in-contact people are saved from the disease. These treatments form part of the global burden of the disease.

With the successful control of canine rabies in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), the number of potential contacts with humans has dramatically decreased. Paradoxically however, with the increased public awareness and improved post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) distribution within the province, there has been an increase in demand for PEP.

Part of the KZN project mandate was to demonstrate a decrease in the demand for PEP by controlling rabies in dogs. This did not happen and other avenues needed to be explored to reduce the financial burden of PEP.

Consequently, the following questions were asked:

- > Why do dogs bite?
- > What human behaviour elicits bites?
- > How can these be avoided?
- > Can bites from rabid dogs be avoided?

Education about bite prevention in KZN became an extension of the disease control project, and should, in future, be a part of all rabies vaccination projects. This will decrease both the incidence of the disease as well as the financial burden of treating dog bites.



Despite a global focus on the number of children dying from rabies, a far higher percentage of adults (66%) are bitten by dogs in KZN each year.

Rabies education, which usually focuses on children, thus needs to be expanded to be more inclusive of the whole of society and broadened in scope to include information on both dog behaviour and bite prevention.

A 'One Health' approach to removing the burden of rabies on society must consider all aspects of the relationship between humans and dogs in order to nurture that valuable relationship while also removing rabies from our societies.