



ACCESS TO VACCINES AND IMMUNOGLOBULINES

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BIOGRAPHY

Dr Bernadette Abela-Ridder is the Focal Point for Rabies at the World Health Organization. She is also the team leader of neglected zoonotic diseases in the Department for the Control of Neglected Tropical Diseases. She dedicates her full energy and wide experience to mobilise countries and stakeholder in attaining shared purpose for improved impact on the health and livelihoods of people in underserved communities.

SUMMARY

Rabies is 100% vaccine preventable. Optimising the supply and access to safe, efficacious and affordable dog and human rabies vaccines and rabies immunoglobulin (RIG) is key to achieving zero human rabies deaths.

While safe vaccines currently exist, needs of at-risk communities remain un-met. Through better forecasting and planning, optimised procurement practices and the support of the private sector, access to vaccine can be improved. The successful neglected tropical disease (NTD) model for medicines could be adapted to rabies by bringing vaccines and RIG to where they are most needed. A coordination mechanism is needed with strong regional participation to assist countries in developing action plans and identifying vaccine needs.

Provision of vaccine can provide stimulus to start up rabies control and elimination programmes, which in turn demonstrate success and trigger interest and further local or foreign investment. Funding strategies should support stimulus packages beyond vaccines. Support is also needed for capacity and awareness building, planning and initiation of local/national/regional programmes and activities, animal handling and communication equipment and implementing standard operating procedures for bite management including shifting to dose and cost sparing intradermal vaccine administration in healthcare centres. Improved access will accelerate discontinuation of nerve tissue-based vaccines that cause frequent and severe adverse events. Through these activities, data are generated that provide the evidence to feed into national policies and encourage political commitment at the country level.

The World Organization for Animal Health (WHO) encourages its Member States to engage in forecasting their vaccine and RIG needs and participate in a bulk procurement mechanism, and investors to support countries in need of stimulus packages.

With joint leadership from the WHO and the OIE, that link the human and animal sectors, optimisation of supply and coordination will assure improved access of quality-assured, safe and affordable dog and human rabies vaccine and RIG to reach rabies elimination.

Each death from the horrifying disease of rabies is one too many, we have the tools to act, the time is now!