



Biosecurity Authority of Fiji & Ministry of Agriculture Marks World Rabies Day



Fiji is free of Rabies and on the occasion of World Rabies Day this year, the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji (BAF) along with its stakeholders take the opportunity to reiterate that it is everyone's responsibility to keep Fiji free from rabies.

Annually, September 28 is recognised as World Rabies Day, a global health observance that started in 2007 to raise awareness about rabies and bring together partners to enhance prevention and control efforts worldwide. This year the theme for the annual event is "Rabies: Facts, not Fear".

Rabies is a zoonotic disease (a disease that is transmitted from animals to humans), caused by the rabies virus, of the Lyssavirus genus, within the family Rhabdoviridae. Domestic dogs are the most common reservoir of the virus, with more than 99% of human deaths caused by dog-mediated rabies.

While rabies is a 100% preventable disease, more than 59,000 people die from the disease globally each year. As such, the World Rabies Day is an opportunity for BAF, Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) and other stakeholders to reflect on our efforts to control this deadly disease and remind ourselves that the fight is not yet over. Improved collaborative approach must be maintained to prevent its entry into Fiji.

The virus is transmitted in the saliva of rabid animals and generally enters the body via infiltration of virus-laden saliva from a rabid animal into a wound (e.g. scratches), or by direct exposure of mucosal surfaces to saliva from an infected animal (e.g. bites). The virus however, cannot infiltrate intact skin.

Any mammal can get rabies. The most common wild reservoirs of rabies are raccoons, skunks, bats, and foxes while domestic mammals such as cats, cattle, and dogs can also get rabies

How Can Rabies Be Prevented?

Rabies has never been reported in Fiji; hence keeping rabies out of Fiji is very important for the health and safety of local Fijian and the local animal population. The international movement of dogs and cats pose risk in spread of rabies for Fiji and other countries. Hence, vaccination against rabies for pets in Fiji is prohibited except for export purpose as a requirement for the importing country.

BAF has imposed necessary mitigation measures to protect Fiji from the exotic disease. BAF allows safe importation of dogs and cats through adequate mitigation measures ONLY.

BAF allows cats and dogs into Fiji via vessels, which is subject to certain terms and conditions. It also allows bonding of any dogs/ cats on vessel in Fiji's territorial waters where dogs/ cats do not meet Fiji's import requirements. Dogs /cats are required to remain secured on-board the vessel at all times while in Fiji's territorial waters and will not be permitted to come ashore and will be monitored by BAF officers.

What Are the General Symptoms of Rabies?

Initially, a dog (or mammal) who's become infected may show extreme behavioural changes such as restlessness or apprehension, both of which may be compounded by aggression. Friendly dogs may become irritable, while normally excitable animals may become more docile. A dog may bite or snap at any form of stimulus, attacking other animals, humans and even inanimate objects.

As the virus progresses, an infected dog may become hypersensitive to touch, light and sound. They may eat unusual things and hide in dark places. Paralysis of the throat and jaw muscles may follow, resulting in the well-known symptom of foaming at the mouth. Disorientation, incoordination and staggering may occur, caused by paralysis of the hind legs. Other classic signs of rabies include loss of appetite, weakness, seizures and sudden death.

What is the incubation period for rabies?

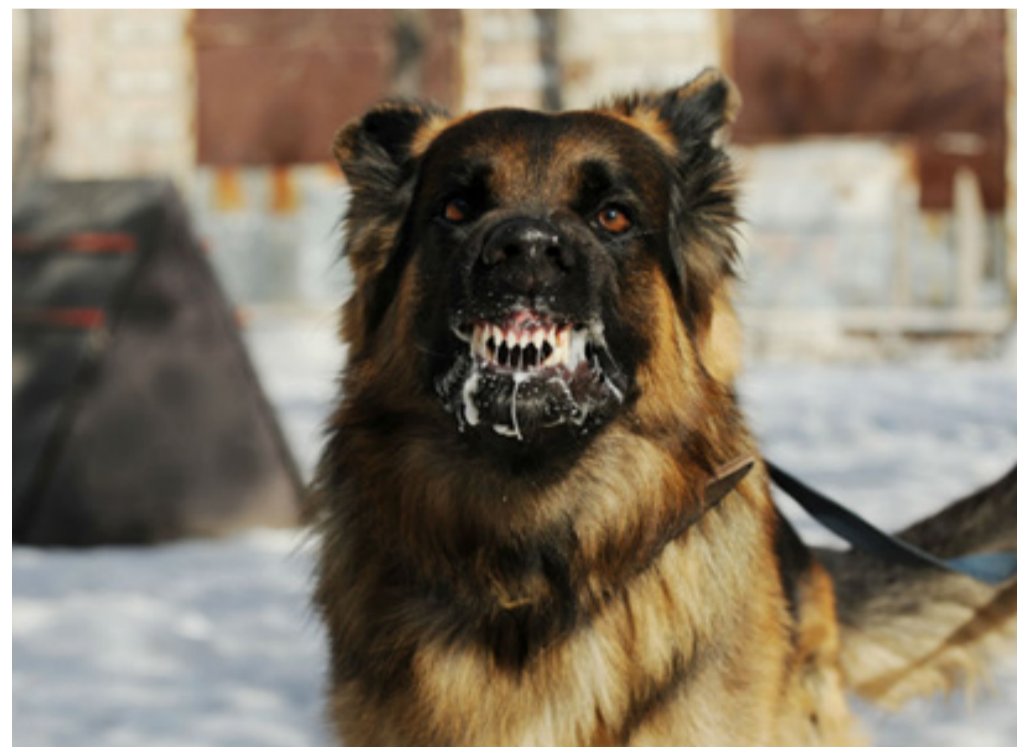
The period of time before clinical signs appear in an infected animal can vary from several days to several months depending on the strain of virus, the species, the individual and the point of entry in the body. The disease can therefore be transmitted to other animals and humans via the saliva of an infected animal, sometimes even before the onset of clinical signs in the infected animal, constituting an insidious threat to anyone coming into contact with the animal.

Which Dogs Are Most at Risk for Contracting Rabies?

Unvaccinated dogs who are allowed to roam outdoors without supervision are most at risk for infection. They're exposed to wild animals and have a greater chance of fighting with infected stray dogs or cats. Undeclared animals on fishing vessels or yacht are at risk of escaping and contacting local animals.

What Should You Do if You Suspect Rabies

If you suspect any animal infected with Rabies, Contact BAF Immediately and report the incident on our short code 5997 or 3312512 or email info@baf.com.fj. After having contact with a rabid animal, the rabies virus may remain alive on your pet's skin for up to two hours. It is best not to touch your dog during this time. If you must handle cats and dogs of unknown origin, wear gloves and protective clothing. If you suspect to have been in contact with rabid animals or being bitten by rabies infected animal, contact medical health services urgently. Let us help in keeping Fiji Free from Rabies.



Dog showing signs of rabies: excessive salivation and aggression (gawling)

For Further Information Please Contact:

Biosecurity Authority of Fiji on 3312512 or Short Codes:
General Enquiries - 5994, Termites - 5996, Giant Invasive Iguana (GII) - 5995,
Animal Disease Surveillance - 5997 or email info@baf.com.fj, visit BAF website www.baf.com.fj