

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE MEC FOR AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT, MME MAPULA MOKABA-PHUKWANA, AT THE PROVINCIAL WORLD RABIES DAY EVENT, RELELA SPORT GROUND, TZANEEN.**

**06 OCTOBER 2016**

**Program Director**

The National Development Plan presents a long-term strategy to better the lives of our people through among others education, vocational training, health and nutrition, public transport and access to information.

The NDP, as the country's macro-economic policy seek to strengthen primary health-care services. Broaden district-based health programmes, such as the community health worker and midwife programmes, and health education.

Today we are here to share information with you and make you aware of the seriousness of the disease known as rabies, derived from rabid animals, especially domestic dogs.

**MEC for Health, Dr. Phophi Ramathuba**

**Mayor of Greater Tzaneen Municipality**

**Local Councillors present here today**

**Representatives of Modjadji Tribal Authority and other Tribal Authorities;**

**HOD'S from represented departments**

**Government and non-governmental representatives**

**Bana ba rona, Members of the Media**

**Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen**

**Thobela!!!**

The **28<sup>th</sup> September, is World Rabies Day** and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in collaboration with the Department of Health, is taking this opportunity to highlight the seriousness of this disease and the importance of protecting ourselves against the Rabies virus.

Our presence here at Modjadji, in the Ralela Village, is an effort to educate, advocate and advise each other about the scourge of Rabies disease, which has claimed many of ordinary people's lives because most were taking it for granted.

As a caring government guided by the Constitution and other international treaties, we believe that our first and primary duty is to make sure that our citizens are safe and healthy. This has been the case since, the dawn of our freedom and democracy and the adoption of the all-inclusive South African Constitution of 1996.

Our government has entered into a social contract with citizens, and our responsibility is to keep everyone safe and healthy. In return, we expect every citizen to respect and abide by the law of the country and to work with the government in making sure that its mandate is achieved. We are hard at work rolling out important facts about the deadly disease known as Rabies.

Rabies affects humans and other mammals but is most common in flesh eaters. It is sometimes referred to as a zoonosis, or disease of animals that can be communicated to humans. Rabies is not airborne, is almost exclusively transmitted through saliva from the bite of an infected animal. Another name for the disease is hydrophobia, which literally means fear of water, a symptom shared by half of all people infected with rabies

Besides the fear of drinking water, other symptoms include fever, depression, confusion, painful muscle spasms, and sensitivity to touch, loud noise, and light. Extreme thirst, painful swallowing, excessive salivation, and loss of muscle tone. If rabies is not prevented by immunization, it is usually deadly.

As the caring Government, we realised that we have to act decisively on this matter. The intervention we are coming with today is just one amongst many that our twenty-two-year old democratic government has been doing since 1994.

It is in that spirit of caring that today we bring to you the 2016 theme on rabies that says: ***Educate. Vaccinate and eliminate.***

We all know that: **“Prevention is better than cure”**

The theme highlights progress made in defeating this horrifying disease. The theme emphasises two crucial actions to educate and vaccinate our domestic animals against rabies. It also reflects on our government’s target to eliminate all human deaths from rabid dogs by 2030.

I am glad that we have managed to bring together members of the community, whom we believe will all be Rabies Ambassadors from today. We also appreciate the valuable medical input from my colleague from the Department of Health, MEC, Dr Phophi Ramathopa.

I am of the opinion that with everything that has been said you will be able to spread what you have learned to your communities. *Ke na le tshepo ya gore se re se jwetseng lehono, se jwetse mo mabung a go nona, mme di poelo tsa gona e tlabana tsa go kgahlisha. Re ratile bana, re ratile baetapele.*

Did you know that about every 10 minutes a person dies from Rabies in the world? Rabies continues to kill almost 70 000 people annually worldwide, the majority being children in developing countries like ours, mainly in sub-Saharan.

Rabies is 100% preventable by vaccination and we have all the necessary tools to control it. We want to continue eliminating challenges that might rob our society of its right to a healthy living. We must all pull together, and commit to make sure that Rabies is eliminated.

As Africans, we love our dogs, cats, horses, cows, goats and many other domestic animals. It is therefore important that we demonstrate the love for our animals by ensuring that they are vaccinated against the disease periodically.

Much as there is poverty and underdevelopment in our communities, we are here to remind each other that, if we work as a united front in the fight against all social challenges, ours will be a prosperous society. We are on course as government to ensure that together we reach the desired destiny of a healthy nation having enough for all of us to share and survive.

I must admit though that at times there are challenges in the field of animal health care, but we are not giving up just yet. We encourage people from the Veterinary profession to help us in both designing and delivering policies that will make a difference in a long run.

In conclusion, Program Director I would like to emphasise that rabies infection is manageable as long as we remember that:

- ✚ Domesticated animals, including household pets, should be vaccinated against rabies.
- ✚ If a pet is bitten by an animal suspected to have rabies, its owner should contact a veterinarian immediately and notify the local animal control authorities.
- ✚ Domestic pets with current vaccinations should be revaccinated immediately; unvaccinated dogs, cats, or ferrets are usually euthanized (killed).
- ✚ Wild animals should not be touched or petted, no matter how friendly they may appear.
- ✚ It is also important not to touch an animal that appears ill or passive or whose behavior seems odd, such as failing to show the normal fear of humans.
- ✚ These are all possible signs of rabies. Many animals, such as raccoons and skunks, are nocturnal and their activity during the day should be regarded as suspicious.
- ✚ People should not interfere in fights between animals.

- ✚ Because rabies is transmitted through saliva, a person should wear rubber gloves when handling a pet that has had an encounter with a wild animal.
- ✚ Garbage or pet food should not be left outside the house or camp site because it may attract wild or stray animals.
- ✚ Windows and doors should be screened. Some victims of rabies have been attacked by infected animals, particularly bats, that entered through unprotected openings.
- ✚ Preventative vaccination against rabies should be considered if one's occupation involves frequent contact with wild animals or non-immunized domestic animals.
- ✚ Bites from mice, rats, or squirrels rarely require rabies prevention because these rodents are typically killed by any encounter with a larger, rabid animal, and would, therefore, not be carriers.
- ✚ Travelers should ask about the prevalence of the disease in countries they plan to visit.
- ✚ Parents should speak with their children about the importance of avoiding contact with wild animals and reporting strange behaviour in any animal.

Health departments should be consulted for information about the prevalence of rabies in an area. In some other regions, they have experienced rabies-free zones and only to have the disease reintroduced later, hence the need to revaccinate periodically.

I would like to thank every member of the community present here, the MEC for Health and government officials in making sure that they too carry the message of Rabies across. Furthermore, I would like to thank all other government Departments, the Local Municipality, our Meshate (Traditional Authorities), and all other stakeholders, for their continued support and contribution towards the success of this public education campaign. I hope and trust that everybody will carry the message back to their communities.

*Together we are moving Limpopo and South Africa Forward.*

**Ke ya Leboga!!!**