

# RABIES IN SRI LANKA

Rabies is an infectious disease that can mainly be transmitted by dogs. Rabies can also be caused by the bite of other infected animals such as cats, jackals and mongoose. A large number of people die from rabies all over the world, every year. In India itself, it is recorded that deaths due to rabies are more than 25,000 annually. Among the countries where rabies has totally been eradicated are Great Britain, Australia, Japan, Singapore and Malaysia.

In Sri Lanka rabies is a public health problem and major source of the disease is infected dogs. Action had been initiated as far back as 1950 to control the disease. The following table shows human deaths from rabies in Sri Lanka.

The number of deaths occurring due to rabies during the 1970s and 1980s has been decreasing. This is because the government has initiated tough action to control the disease. However, the figures show fluctuations during the 1970s with the highest recording of 377 in 1973. It is also noteworthy that after 1984 the number of deaths from rabies has sharply declined. This is mainly because of the effectiveness of WHO assisted Accelerated Intensive Rabies Control Programme (1981 - 1985). Under this programme high priority was given to elimination of stray dogs and intensification of vaccination coverage. During the period of 1986-87 the deaths due to rabies has increased due to the failure to maintain this programme.

The annual average human rabies death rate per 100,000 of population, was 1.76 (1960/70) and 2.01 (70/80). The main victims of the disease are children under 15 years

of age and approximately 40% of deaths are in this age group.

The incidence of human rabies is unequally distributed across the Country.

the highest frequencies are to be found in the North - Western, Western, Central and North Central Provinces. The lowest frequencies could be observed in the Northern Province.

1. The rate of human cases per 100,000 population has decreased from 2.9 in 1973 to 1.8 in 1983.

2. The incidence of canine rabies has decreased by two third since 1977.

3. Human post exposure treatments (attendance at ARV clinics) have decreased from 94083 in 1970 and 14820 in 1986 (84.2%).

Although medical science has made breakthrough in most areas there is still no cure for rabies. However, infections could definitely be avoided

Year	No of deaths	Year	No. of deaths
1968	290	1978	242
1969	235	1979	265
1970	262	1980	191
1971	270	1981	207
1972	295	1982	196
1973	377	1983	183
1974	347	1884	92 *
1975	288	1985	82 *
1976	257	1986	101 *
1977	312	1987	123 *
		1988	88 *

\* Provisional

Sources: Seminar paper form media personal at HEB

## Control Programmes

The first WHO assisted five year control programme was started in 1975. The second WHO assisted programme (Accelerated Intensive Rabies Control Programme) was launched in 1981 covering five years. The accelerated programme was further extended with the launching of AGFUND/RB/WHO.

There are three main factors which indicate the impact of control programmes. They are:

by vaccinations. When a rabid dog or a suspected dog bites, the wound should be washed properly using soap and the vaccination should immediately be taken.

The first vaccination should be given immediately after the bite and second vaccination on the third day, the third vaccination on 7th day 4th vaccination in 14 th day, 5th vaccination on 30 th day to be given. Instead of the five day vaccination a three day vaccination is to be introduced in the near future.