

From the Chief Medical Officer
Dr Michael McBride



Department of
**Health, Social Services
and Public Safety**

www.dhsspsni.gov.uk

HSS(MD) 17/2008

AN ROINN

**Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta
agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí**

MÁNNYSTRIE O

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To:

Directors of Public Health of HSS Boards
All General Practitioners – *please ensure this message is
seen by all practice nurses and non-principals working in
your practice and retain a copy in your 'locum information
pack'*

Out of Hours Centres

Medical Directors of HSC Trusts - *for cascade to:*

- Accident and Emergency Departments
- Consultant Microbiologists and Virologists

Consultants in Communicable Disease Control HSS Boards
Director, Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service
Director of Pharmacy, Belfast HSC Trust

Dear Colleague

FRANCE DECLARES LOSS OF RABIES FREE STATUS: IMPLICATIONS FOR BRITISH TRAVELLERS

Further to the urgent communication HSS(MD)7/2008 of 3 March 2008 that informed recipients of a rabies incident in France [1] involving an illegally imported dog and transmission to two indigenous dogs, the French Ministry of Agriculture has declared that France has lost its rabies-free status.

French officials have confirmed that there is a low but increased risk of rabies in three previously identified areas of France [2]:

- *Gers (Auch city and surroundings)*
- *Seine-et-Marne (environs of Grandpuits)*
- *Calvados (Lisieux city and Thury Harcourt village and their surroundings).*

Elsewhere the risk of rabies is considered to be extremely small, but cannot be completely ruled out.

Advice has been published by the Health Protection Agency (www.hpa.org.uk) and NaTHNaC (<http://www.nathnac.org/>) for British travellers to France including information on the risk of rabies in France and change of rabies-free status. All British travellers are reminded of the need to avoid contact with animals particularly in the risk areas where possible and advised to seek prompt medical assessment if exposed (through animal bites, scratches and licks around the eyes, mouth or on open wounds) in the local rabies clinic in France [3] or if not possible from their GP on return to the UK.

GPs, A&Es and other health care professionals need to continue being vigilant for people reporting dog bites that have occurred in France.

Doctors should seek expert advice and possible treatment for their patients as they would in any case of a dog bite where rabies may be involved, by contacting the HPA duty doctor on 020 8200 6868. People bitten by a dog in the places indicated should be offered treatment to prevent rabies.

Biting is the most common way in which rabies is transmitted from dogs to humans, but there is also a slight risk of transmission from scratches or if the dog has licked a person on a cut, on the mouth, or around the eyes.

Further information on risk assessment and use of rabies vaccine and immunoglobulin is available from the Health Protection Agency (see <http://www.hpa.org.uk/> for contact details or telephone 020 8200 6868).

References

1. HPA. Canine rabies in France, *Health Protection Report* [serial online] 2008; 2 (10, 7): news. <http://www.hpa.org.uk/hpr/archives/2008/news1008.htm>
2. French Ministry of Agriculture guidance for vets following the recent canine cases (in French), 19 March 2008 [accessed 24 April 2008], http://agriculture.gouv.fr/sections/publications/bulletin-officiel/2008/bo-n-12-du-21-03-08/note-d-information-dgal6060/downloadFile/FichierAttache_1_f0/DGALO20088008Z.pdf?nocache=1206087673.53
3. Addresses of French rabies clinics are available at: <http://cmip.pasteur.fr/cmed/voy/Car2007.pdf>

Yours sincerely



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