

UP's veterinary staff put World Rabies Day into practice in communities in the Moloto-area

Posted on October 03, 2022



Awaiting his turn to be vaccinated

28 September 2022 marked the 16th World Rabies Day. This year's theme was "Rabies: One Health, Zero Deaths", highlighting the connection of the environment with both people and animals. Staff of the Onderstepoort Veterinary Academic Hospital (OVAH), the teaching hospital of the University of Pretoria's Faculty of Veterinary Science participated in the world-wide rabies day activities by visiting informal settlements in the Moloto-area north-east of Onderstepoort. The team, consisting of a veterinarian and six veterinary nurses from the OVAH, joined forces with a local animal welfare organisation, Pawesome Whacky Whiskers which has been active in the area for many years, getting to know and earning the trust of the people living in the settlements.



The team from the Onderstepoort Veterinary Academic Hospital (OVAH)

Early Wednesday morning the team set up a station for the vaccinations and health checks. One of the OVAH's well-equipped mobile clinics was at hand to make sure that sick and/or injured animals could be given proper care. After performing a thorough health check on all the pets presented to the team, the pets were vaccinated against rabies with vaccines kindly provided by Gauteng Veterinary Services. To make sure that the best possible preventive care was provided, the OVAH made vaccines against other infectious pet diseases and deworming products available, while the global animal health company Zoetis sponsored tick and flea treatments. The pet food manufacturer UltraPet made a generous donation of dog food. The founder of Pawesome Whacky Whiskers, Dorette Smit, made sure that all the pets in the settlements were vaccinated by leading some team members on house-calls to the pet owners who did not make the trip to the vaccination station, proving once again that it is essential to involve someone with knowledge of the area in all vaccination campaigns.

At the end of a very warm and dusty day the team could happily report that almost 100 dogs and cats had been vaccinated. The team also provided valuable advice to pet owners, both on feeding and general pet care, while the attending veterinarian was able to help some ill and injured animals, including a cat with a leg injury.

The initiator of the campaign, Dr Paul van Dam, Director of the OVAH, said: "Rabies is a viral disease that can be transferred from pets to their owners. The virus is shed in the saliva of pets and can be transferred when they bite someone, but also when the saliva comes into contact with an existing wound on the person. It is a frightening disease, as there is no known treatment once symptoms occur." The Faculty of Veterinary Science is involved in initiatives to protect communities against the disease. "As dogs are the source of 99% of human rabies infections, rabies can be prevented by vaccinating cats and dogs. It is our duty to inform and educate communities about the possible risks if pets are not vaccinated against this disease," he said.

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