

Rabies elimination: Thailand leads the way for different nations in the South-East Asian region

Dear Editor,

Rabies is a preventable zoonotic disease, which is being reported in more than 150 nations and territories, with the majority of the affected people are from rural and poor socioeconomic status.^[1] Even though various animals have been identified; dogs remain the most common source of disease-specific death rates and transmission of almost 99% of all cases.^[1] However, owing to the fatal nature of the disease and expensive nature of the postexposure prophylaxis, especially in the developing nations, it is of immense importance to minimize the incidence of the disease.^[1]

Acknowledging the facts that accomplishment of rabies elimination is a feasible approach, the international welfare agencies have set a global target to accomplish zero human deaths due to the disease by 2030.^[1] Apart from emphasizing the role of the vaccine, special emphasis has been given toward creating awareness about the disease and prevention of dog bites among the potential high-risk population and their roles and responsibilities.^[1,2] To attain the global targets, the disease has been declared as one of the neglected tropical diseases, and better collaboration between involved sectors that too at the national, regional, and global levels has been advocated.^[1,2] In fact, a global framework has been designed to provide a common ground for both animal and health sector to work together against the disease.^[1,2]

In addition, to ensure that no case goes unreported, the disease has been declared as a notifiable disease, and special attention has been given toward strengthening of the surveillance activities.^[1] Further, efforts have been taken to maintain the stocks of vaccines (both dogs and humans), so that the prevention and control activities are never paralyzed due to the shortage of vaccines.^[1] Furthermore, to address the existing gaps, the international agencies are supporting the conduct of various studies to obtain precise information on the incidence of dog bites and human cases, postexposure prophylaxis and follow-up, the requirement of vaccines, etc.^[1-4] The findings of these studies will pave the way for the international stakeholders to define the future strategy.^[2,4]

In fact, due to the concerted efforts of the stakeholders, and better support from the Royal Kingdom, Thailand is on the right track to accomplish rabies-free status by 2020, and thus attainment of zero human rabies deaths by 2030 worldwide.^[3] The available estimates from the nation indicated that a 90% decline in the number of cases had been observed, in contrast to the estimates of the 1980s.^[3] In addition, the nation has adopted innovative strategies such as the use of safe, cheap, and effective intradermal vaccines for humans than the conventional intramuscular postexposure prophylaxis.^[3]

Despite having considerable gains, the nation remains committed towards increasing the coverage of vaccines at the village levels, in order to not only save thousands of human lives but also even ensure the vaccination of 70% of dogs.^[3,4] The plan is to establish mobile units to enable provision of timely care to the affected individuals and also extend services to the dogs whenever possible.^[3] The success obtained in Thailand is a clear indication for other nations in the South-East Asian region to work in a sustained manner to achieve the global set targets.^[3]

To conclude, for accomplishing prevention and control of rabies, there is an immense need to have a sound policy, interventions to target both human and animal sectors, strengthening of the advocacy and social mobilization activities and capacity building.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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