

## Preliminary Outbreak Assessment

# Rabies in a cat in Italy

1 July 2020

Ref: VITT/1200 Rabies, Italy

## Disease report

Italy has reported a case of rabies in a cat in the province of Arezzo, in Tuscany. The animal died after exhibiting clinical signs of the disease, and tested positive shortly after.



Map prepared by IDM

Date: 30/06/2020

Absolute scale:1:10,000,000

Rabies in Italy, June 2020

0 65 130 260 390 520 Km

## Situation assessment

On 27 June, a two year old cat from the Arezzo province was confirmed to have rabies, following IFT and PCR testing by the National Reference Centre for Rabies (IZS delle Venezie) in Italy. The cat started to show clinical signs including breathing difficulty, tremors and a staggering gait, and died four days later. It was then sent for testing.

Sequencing of the virus from the cat showed 98.52% homology with West Caucasian Bat Lyssavirus (WCBV). There are known to be some bat colonies near to the house at which the cat resided, and this is suggested to be the source of the virus. This lyssavirus was previously detected in an insectivorous bat, Schreibers' Bent-winged bat (*Miniopterus schreibersii*), in the western Caucasus Mountains of southeastern Europe in 2002 (WHO). Antibodies to WCBV have also been reported in *Miniopterus* bats in Kenya (Kuzmin, I.V. et al, 2008). There are no reported incidents of WCBV in humans.

The affected cat was housed with another cat, three kittens and one dog. It is not known whether any of these animals were vaccinated. It was also free to come and go from the house during daytime and at night. The remaining animals at the household are under observation, and as yet, no clinical signs have been observed. Movement tracings and a restriction on movements have been put in place.

Between 2008 and 2013 cases of classical rabies were continually reported in Italy in red foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*), other wildlife, and occasionally in domestic livestock and pets. This was confined to the Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Veneto regions in the North-east of the country. Following surveillance in wildlife and domestic animals, and oral vaccination of foxes in areas along the borders of Italy, Slovenia and Austria, Italy been classed as rabies free since February 2013 (IZSve, 2013).

## Conclusion

There remains a very low risk of introduction of rabies to the UK via legal imports or movement of wildlife. This report in Italy concerns spill over of lyssaviruses from bats into domestic pets or livestock, which is rare in Europe, but events such as this highlight the risk posed by lyssavirus circulation in bat populations. The Schreibers' Bent-winged bats are common in the Mediterranean Basin, but are not found in the UK.

Under the PETS regulations, a pet cat, dog or ferret must only travel between EU Member States in possession of a passport which confirms up to date vaccination against rabies. Vaccination when administered correctly, provides immunological protection against an animal developing disease if subsequently infected by classical rabies virus and most of the bat lyssaviruses present in Europe. However, vaccine protection against WCBV is not guaranteed, so it is important to prevent contact between pets and bats.

It is possible, although very rare, for infected bats to pass rabies to other animals including pets. If a pet catches a bat, the pet must be kept under observation. If a pet falls sick or starts behaving unusually, the owner must contact their vet immediately. The vet will tell APHA if he or she suspects rabies.

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## References

All disease reports are available from the OIE WAHIS database.

WHO Rabies Bulletin (2020) <https://www.who-rabies-bulletin.org/site-page/classification>

Kuzmin, I.V., Niezgoda, M., Franka, R., et al. (2008) Possible emergence of West Caucasian bat virus in Africa. *Emerg Infect Dis.* 14:1887-1889.

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Advice Services - International Disease Monitoring



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