



agriculture, land reform & rural development

Department:
Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

MEDIA STATEMENT

UPDATE ON THE SUSPECTED CASE OF RIFT VALLEY FEVER (RVF) IN FREE STATE

19 February 2021

The Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) would like to update the nation on the reports of a suspected Rift Valley Fever (RVF) near Kimberly in the Free State province. Government Veterinary Services were alerted when a laboratory test result for RVF was received that required further investigation. The provincial veterinary services have since conducted a follow-up investigation on the suspect farm and did not find sufficient epidemiological evidence of RVF. Additional testing of samples also excluded RVF. This means that for 2021, no outbreak of RVF has been confirmed in the country.

The department is; however, keeping a close eye on the situation and will provide further updates if required. The department requests the livestock industry to also remain vigilant for potential cases of RVF in their sheep, goats and cattle.

Farmers are reminded that a laboratory result alone is not sufficient to confirm a diagnosis. The clinical signs and history must also be taken into account to confirm a disease outbreak. In this case, a farm investigation excluded RVF and provided some evidence that an alternative cause of death in the sheep should be considered.

The department wishes also to remind livestock farmers that there is an effective vaccine for cattle, sheep and goats against RVF which they need to use to keep their livestock safe. The live attenuated RVF vaccine ('Rift Valley Fever Live' from Onderstepoort Biological Products, OBP) must only be used in non-pregnant animals because it can cause abortions. All sheep, goats and cattle should be vaccinated at least once in their life at weaning with the live attenuated RVF vaccine and booster vaccinations should be given yearly before the breeding season in higher risk areas. Only dead/inactivated ('Rift Valley Fever Inactivated' from OBP) vaccine must be used on pregnant animals. It is the responsibility of animal owners to vaccinate their animals to prevent RVF outbreaks which can cause large-scale deaths of their animals that can lead to substantial financial losses.

The department further urges all farmers to be on the lookout for any clinical signs of RVF and to report any suspect cases to their nearest State Veterinary Office.

Multiple abortions or deaths of sheep, goats or cattle in areas that have seen good recent rainfall and increased mosquito activity, may require investigation. Confirmation of a RVF outbreak requires samples of carcasses or abortions to be safely collected and submitted to the lab. RVF is a zoonosis, so when collecting samples or handling aborted material, always make sure you are wearing the correct Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

Most people get sick from RVF 2 to 6 days after contact with the virus and they typically show flu-like symptoms (fever, muscle pain, back ache, weakness and dizziness). If such symptoms are observed after contact with sick or dead animals, consult your nearest doctor as soon as possible.

The department requests the public to refrain from spreading rumours of RVF outbreaks and to rather ensure that any suspicion of RVF is reported immediately to the nearest State Veterinary Office or departmental office. This will ensure proper investigation and official communication of the true disease scenario.

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Issued by the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development:

- Media Liaison Officer and Spokesperson: Mr Reggie Ngcobo, **0662980980**, MLO.Minister@dalrrd.gov.za
- Eviction Toll-free Number 0800 007 095

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