

## **Advice 17-2015 of the Scientific Committee of the FASFC on a draft ministerial decree in regard to rabies control and evaluation of the need for mandatory vaccination against rabies in Belgium.**

Rabies can take various epidemiological forms: the sylvatic form (fox rabies), the urban form (canine rabies) and the form related to bats (bat rabies). As rabies is a serious zoonotic disease, the control of this disease is regulated at both European and national level.

The Scientific Committee is asked to evaluate a draft ministerial decree on rabies control in Belgium. This ministerial decree provides (1) the discontinuation of mandatory rabies vaccination of dogs residing south of the Sambre and Meuse river and (2) the mandatory vaccination of dogs and cats staying at camping or caravanning sites all over Belgium. It is also asked to the Scientific Committee to assess the need for additional vaccinations to protect public health and, if this is the case, to issue proposals on which animal species, regions of Belgium and circumstances have to be taken into account.

This advice is formulated based on the current epidemiological situation of rabies, taking into account that fox rabies has been eradicated in Belgium and in neighboring countries and is in sharp decline in Europe, and that canine rabies is absent in Europe.

Given the eradication of fox rabies in Belgium and the epidemiological situation in Europe, the Scientific Committee is of the opinion that the mandatory systematic vaccination of dogs south of the Sillon Sambre and Meuse river is no longer justified. For the same reason, and also because, according to the EU legislation, vaccination of dogs, cats and ferrets is mandatory when introduced into Belgium, the Scientific Committee does not recommend the mandatory vaccination in Belgium of these dogs, cats and ferrets from Belgian origin during camping or caravanning, or even in other circumstances such as recreation centers, dog collection points or families, or in special target groups. The Committee recalls that the immediate vaccination may be made compulsory in dogs, cats and ferrets on the basis of a risk assessment in case of confirmation of a case of rabies in Belgium or in case the epidemiological situation in the neighboring countries changes.

The Scientific Committee considers that a good way to limit the consequences of illegal introductions of infected animals and limit the risk of rabies in Belgium is to conduct information campaigns and awareness actions among the public and veterinarians to encourage dog, cat and ferret owners to vaccinate their animals on a voluntary basis and in order to keep them informed about European legislation in regard to import and movement of dogs, cats and ferrets.

In addition, inspections should be programmed in places most at risk for the presence of unvaccinated animals coming from foreign countries (ex. camping) to control the correct application of mandatory rabies vaccination required by European legislation.

The full text is available on this website in dutch and in french, respectively under the section "Wetenschappelijk Comité/Adviezen" and "Comité scientifique/Avis".