

THE LAST MILE: YOU, ME, AND THE FIGHT AGAINST RABIES

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INTRODUCTION

India is the “Human Rabies capital of the world” accounting to 36% of the world’s rabies deaths (WHO) every year. Dogs are the source of the vast majority of human rabies deaths, contributing up to 99% of all rabies transmissions to humans. Rabies deaths in human are 100% preventable through prompt and appropriate medical care. Vaccinating dogs is the most cost-effective strategy for preventing rabies in people.

World Rabies Day was initiated by the Global Alliance for Rabies Control (GARC) in 2007. Every year, 28th September is celebrated annually to raise awareness about rabies prevention and marks the anniversary of Louis Pasteur's death, the French chemist and microbiologist, who developed the first rabies vaccine in 1885. Rabies Day reminds us that the fight against rabies is not just about science it is about urgency, awareness, and action. The 2025 theme, “Act Now: You, Me, Community,” is more than a slogan; it is a powerful call to responsibility, where every person, family, and system has a significant role to play.

The message is simple yet profound: we already hold the keys to a rabies-free world. But keys only work when they are turned. Protecting our loved ones begins with vaccinating our pets, educating ourselves about risks, and supporting prevention programs. When individuals, leaders, and communities act together, change becomes unstoppable. Rabies does not wait, so neither should we, the time to act is now.

You – Take action in your personal life: vaccinate your dog, educate yourself about how to prevent rabies and Pre- and Post-

Exposure Prophylaxis, or advocate for better policies.

Me – Lead by example: inspire others, train professionals, or support rabies elimination efforts in your community.

Community – Work together: organize vaccination campaigns, educate learners and their families, and push for stronger rabies elimination programs.

Rabies is a viral zoonotic disease that has been documented for over 4000 years and is almost always fatal once clinical signs of acute progressive encephalitis emerge. Globally, it accounts for an estimated 59,000 human deaths and more than 3.7 million disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) annually, predominantly impacting underserved populations. In regions where rabies is endemic, dogs are responsible for up to 99% of human rabies cases, with approximately 40% of these cases occurring in children under 15 years old. Wild carnivore species and bats act as significant reservoirs for the rabies virus (RABV).

Prevention efforts for rabies heavily rely on public awareness among at-risk populations and mass dog vaccination campaigns, targeting 70% coverage in endemic areas to disrupt RABV transmission and save human lives. The WHO, in collaboration with partners, has endorsed the ambitious goal of achieving “Zero Human Rabies Deaths from dog-transmitted rabies by 2030”.

Dog-mediated human rabies can be eliminated by tackling the disease at its source: infected dogs. Making people aware of how to avoid the bites of rabid dogs, to seek

treatment when bitten and to vaccinate animals can successfully disrupt the rabies transmission cycle.

Shorter, resource-saving human vaccine regimens

WHO now supports abbreviated intradermal (ID) vaccine schedules and shorter 1-week regimens in many settings, reducing the number of clinic visits needed for PEP without compromising protection. These changes make lifesaving treatment easier to deliver and more affordable in low-resource areas.

Stronger One Health surveillance

New research emphasizes linking animal and human health surveillance so dog rabies trends trigger rapid human health responses. Studies from recent years show that gaps in human case reporting often hide the true toll of rabies and that better integrated surveillance can reveal where action is needed most (Kahariri et al., 2025).

Vaccine and program innovation

Reviews of vaccine developments describe a continued push from classical vaccines to more modern, scalable approaches — making mass dog vaccination and human PEP programs easier to roll out at scale. These developments are critical for the global goal of eliminating dog-mediated human rabies by 2030 (Khan et al., 2025).

Eliminating rabies is not solely a technical challenge it is social. Mass dog vaccination campaigns, community education, responsible pet ownership, and rapid access to PEP all depend on people acting together. Here's what each actor can realistically do.

YOU(THE INDIVIDUAL)

Responsible pet parenting

All pet parents must and should vaccinate their pet and register in the local vet clinics. Pet owners should take proper isolated health care in case of any disease and infection. It is not recommended to abandon the infected animal which increases the risk of spread of disease.

Knowledge on First aid and protection

If a dog / cat bites or scratches you or your child, immediate first aid should be done. Wash the wound with soap and running water for at least 15 minutes, then seek medical care right away. Don't wait to see if symptoms. Keep your dogs and cats up-to-date with rabies vaccinations; vaccinated pets protect households and neighbourhoods. (WHO ,2024). Most rabies victims are children. Teach kids not to approach or try to play with unfamiliar dogs, especially stray or sick-looking animals. Use role-play or simple safety rules: ask the owner before touching a dog; don't run past dogs; if knocked down, curl into a ball and protect your face.

ME (HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS, TEACHERS, COMMUNITY LEADERS)

Healthcare providers

Both human and animal health care professionals should recognize potential exposures, provide prompt PEP as per WHO guidance, and report bite incidents. Local awareness campaigns before World Rabies Day and beyond with simple, repeated messages using social media , print media increase vaccine uptake and prompt health-seeking after a bite. Schools are an excellent platform for sustained education targeting children and caregivers. (Rabiesallience, 2024) .

COMMUNITY (MUNICIPALITIES, ANIMAL WELFARE GROUPS, LOCAL NGOS)

Mass dog vaccination drives

The single most effective long-term strategy to prevent human rabies is mass vaccination of dogs, aiming for at least ~70% coverage in dog populations to interrupt transmission.

Community-organized vaccination campaigns — with clear logistics and public communication — work. Recent local campaigns (city and district-level programs worldwide) show success when authorities partner with vets and civil society. (Cleaveland etal 2015)

Integrated bite reporting and response

Communities can set up straightforward bite-report hotlines and referral pathways so bite victims receive rapid assessment and PEP. Linking these systems to animal health surveillance allows a rapid public-health response if rabid animals are detected (Vial et al ., 2019).

Responsible feeding and population management

Humane dog population management (sterilization where appropriate) combined with vaccination reduces both conflict and disease risk. Policy should avoid unscientific responses — for example, indiscriminate culling does not control rabies and harms community trust; mass vaccination and sterilization programs are the recommended, effective paths (Erkyihun et al., 2024).

Behavioural change and practice

It is the responsibility of the community to keep their surroundings clean and hygiene . Maintaining proper waste disposal management and maintaining covered garbage bins in the streets prevent stray dog population. Stringent action need to be imposed by the government if there is any deviation in food waste and garbage disposal especially by the hotels , restaurants, street food points and marriage function halls.

Ruling out misconceptions and myths related to animal bite

Majority of the communities still believe that dog bite treatment is taking series

of painful injections in the abdomen. Few cultural practices include applying clay , turmeric , chilli paste, oil on affected area or performing pooja, witchcraft, wearing gems and stones, herbal extracts, dietary modifications etc., hampering the treatment taking behaviour. Community need to be sensitized about the misconceptions myths through IEC technologies.

CONCLUSION

Rabies is not an unsolvable puzzle; it is a test of our collective will. We already possess the vaccines, the knowledge, and the tools to consign this disease to history. What we need now is the courage to transform awareness into coordinated action. A rabies-free world will not arrive through isolated efforts but through a chain of shared responsibility each link held by individuals, professionals, and communities alike. When every dog/cat is vaccinated, every bite is reported, and every victim is treated without delay, the cycle of fear ends.

Elimination is within reach, and the deadline is clear: zero human deaths by 2030. This is not just a health target; it is a moral commitment to protect children, families, and future generations from a preventable tragedy. Let rabies be remembered not as a failure of neglect but as a triumph of unity. If we act now — you, me, and the community together — we can turn this vision into reality.

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