

**Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine has identified evidence of exposure to Lyssavirus in an imported sable**

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) has identified evidence of exposure to lyssavirus in a sable (a small carnivorous mammal) which had been imported into Ireland as a pet. Lyssaviruses can affect all mammals. . The Lyssavirus family of viruses includes rabies virus.

On the 7 January 2020, DAFM was made aware of a sable that was intermittently displaying atypical behaviour. DAFM investigations identified that the animal was kept securely confined at a private premises in County Cork and there was no evidence of contact with animals outside the household. However, the animal was euthanised as the investigation could not rule out rabies infection, in accordance with our emergency preparedness contingency plan.

In parallel the Department liaised closely with both the Health Service Executive (HSE)'s regional Department of Public Health and Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC). The HSE has identified, and is following up, a small number of individuals who may have had any potential risk exposure to the animal.

Initial screening tests by the Department's Central Veterinary Laboratory and the European Reference Laboratory (EURL) in France were negative. On 23 January, following further confirmatory test methods, the EURL reported evidence of low levels of lyssavirus genetic material in brain samples from the animal. Based on these EURL results, rabies cannot be ruled out in the sable.

No contact with any other animals outside the household has been identified. Although the likelihood of spread to other animals in the area is extremely low, DAFM is now putting some additional precautionary measures in place in the surveillance zone set out in the map in the attached annex:

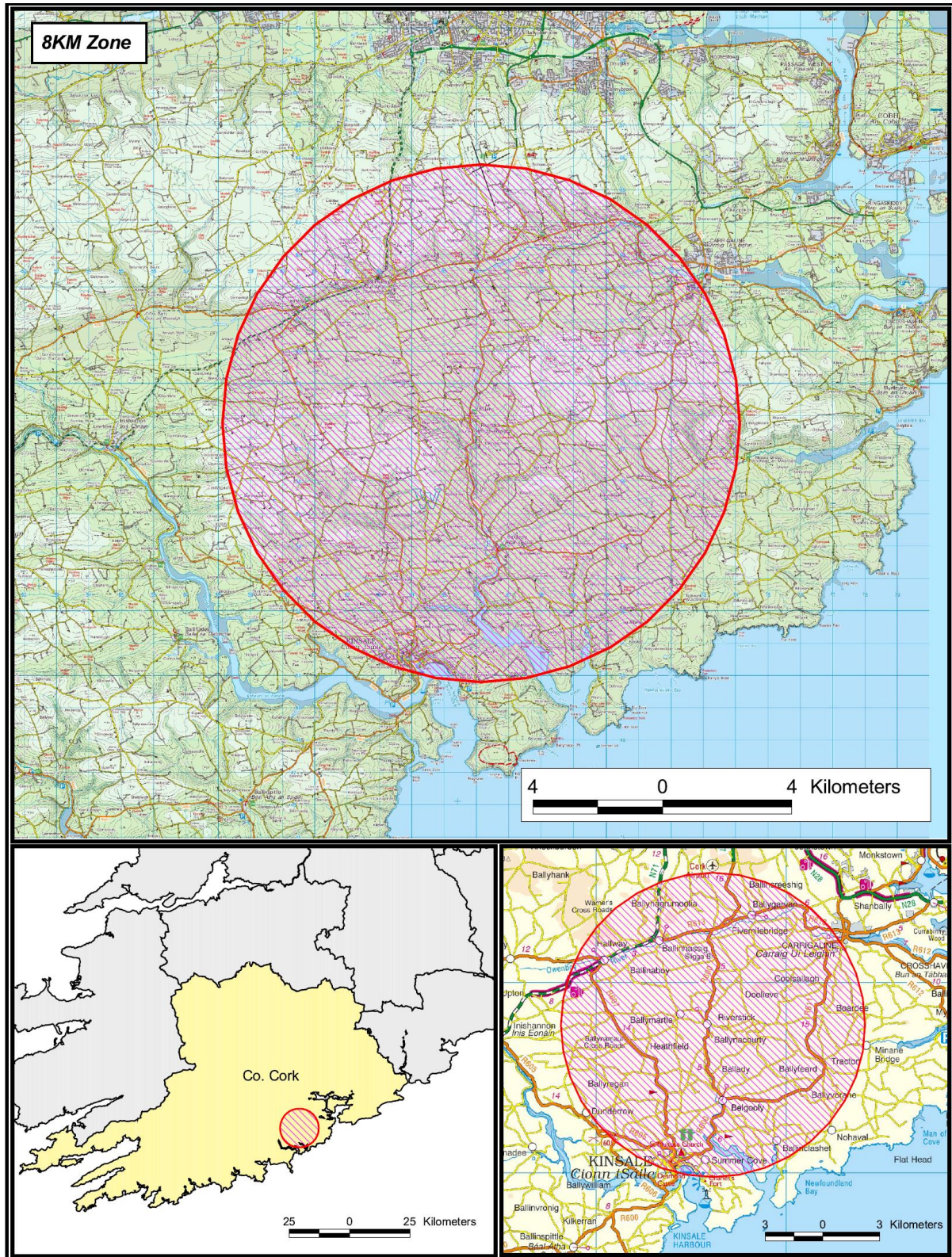
- (a) Gatherings of dogs, cats or ferrets, including hunting, sales, fairs etc. will be prohibited.
- (b) Any found-dead mammals in the area should be reported to DAFM.

These temporary measures will remain in place in for a month subject to review.

Owners of dogs, cats and ferrets are advised to monitor the health and behaviour of their animals and report any abnormal or unusual behaviour in their animals to DAFM. Any members of the public in the surveillance zone who require further information can ring the DAFM Regional Office in Cork on 021 4851400.

Further information on rabies is available on the DAFM website at <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/animalhealthwelfare/diseasecontrol/rabies/> and on the Health Protection Surveillance Centre website [Health Protection Surveillance Centre \(HPSC\)](#).

Annex





## Notes to Editors

### General Information on Rabies

#### Introduction:

- Ireland is rabies free since 1903.
- Lyssaviruses are in the Rhabdovirus family.
- There are 16 lyssaviruses, categorised into 2 groups.
- European Bat Lyssavirus and rabies are types of lyssaviruses.
- Lyssaviruses are spread in saliva of infected animals.
- Lyssaviruses affect the brains of mammals. Signs of disease involve changes in behaviour, such as unusual aggression, fearfulness or friendliness out of character for the individual animal.
- European bat lyssavirus, can be found in bats in the UK, but there is no evidence this has transferred to the domestic animal population there.
- Rabies occurs worldwide and is responsible for up to 59,000 human deaths per year, with most occurring in developing countries caused by dog bites.

#### Rabies:

- Rabies is a severe, viral disease that can affect all mammals, including humans. Infection results in damage to the nervous system.
- Rabies is most commonly spread by biting (direct contact) by an infected animal whose saliva contains the virus. Less commonly, exposure to the virus occurs by entry of saliva, brain or spinal cord fluid of an infected animal into cuts or breaks in the skin or mucous membranes (e.g., eyes, nose, mouth). The virus is not thought to be spread by blood, urine or faeces.
- The disease has a highly variable incubation period of several months before clinical signs appear.
- Signs of disease involve changes in behaviour, such as unusual aggression, fearfulness or friendliness out of character for the individual animal. Other signs include restlessness, paralysis of their legs, difficulty swallowing, drooling and a change in the sound of their voice.
- The disease, if left untreated, almost always ends in death.

#### Can people get rabies?

- Yes. People primarily get rabies from the bite (**direct contact**) of an infected animal. Further information regarding infection with Rabies in ANIMALS can be found at <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/animalhealthwelfare/diseasecontrol/rabies/>
- Further information regarding infection with Rabies virus in humans can be found on the [Health Protection Surveillance Centre \(HPSC\)](#) and on [World Health Organisation](#) websites.