

# VACCINATE NOW AGAINST WET SEASON POTENTIAL FOR RIFT VALLEY FEVER

## Standard Bank

Standard Bank's Agricultural Banking division encourages South African farmers to take early action, through vaccination, against the potential of another outbreak of Rift Valley Fever this year as the La Niña-triggered unusually wet summer season is likely to see an increase in mosquito activity and potency.

Rift Valley Fever (RVF), first identified in 1915, is a viral zoonosis (an infectious disease that can be transmitted from animals to humans) carried by mosquitoes that affects mainly domestic livestock, with sheep being more susceptible than cattle. Humans that come into contact with the blood, body fluids, or body tissue of infected animals can become ill and, in some cases, die. In the May 2010 outbreak in South Africa, 15 people died.

In animals, lambs, calves, and kids under the age of two weeks are worst affected, having a mortality rate of 90% and, usually, dying within 24 to 36 hours of being bitten. Most pregnant females will abort their unborn young and the mortality rate among adult animals ranges from 5% to 30%.

In the 1970s, during what is known as an epizootic period after heavy rains followed by surface flooding in which the mosquitoes breed, some 20 000 animals died.

"In other words, the potential for a significant proportion of a farmer's breeding stock along with the whole of the year's new crop to be wiped out, is very high," says Standard Bank Senior Manager Agribusiness Support, MC Loock. "Unless preventative measures in terms of sustained vaccination - are taken, the financial viability of a livestock operation can be destroyed in a matter of a few weeks.

"Some farmers take the view that because outbreaks of RVF are sporadic - sometimes as much as a decade apart it's worth taking the risk of not vaccinating."

"In our view, however, the risk far outweighs the cost and trouble of vaccinating."

The vaccine is comparatively inexpensive because it is produced by the state and, if animals are vaccinated at six months of age, they have lifelong immunity.

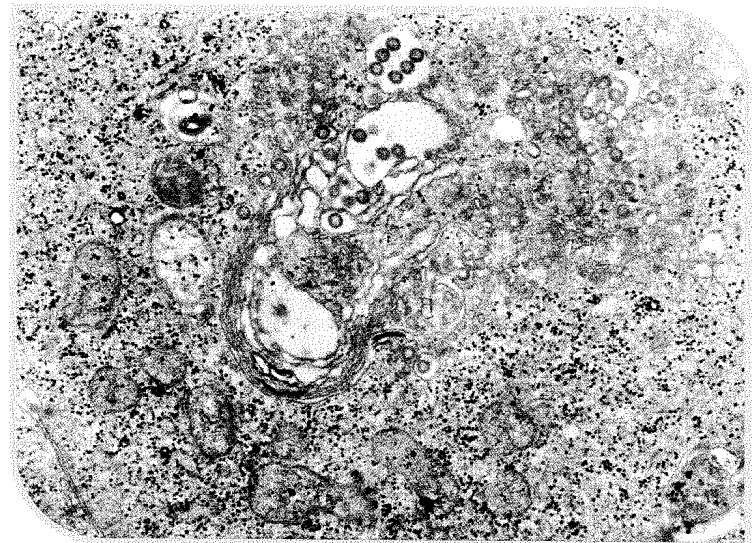
"So, making sure that all your young animals are vaccinated protects your entire investment in your cattle, sheep, and goats for as long as you have them," Mr Loock says.

Inoculation during an outbreak is not effective. So, farmers who have not yet inoculated their animals yet should consider taking preventative measures until vaccination can be done and for at least three to four weeks after inoculation.

"The point being that not vaccinating your animals not only puts you at risk of losing the animals, it also creates downstream problems for you,"

Mr Loock says. "Farming is challenging enough. Why make additional obstacles for yourself when the answer, in this case, is so simple?"

Mosquito control is one emergency measure. Another is moving livestock, where possible, to higher altitudes where it is too cold for mosquitoes to be active. A third is to confine stock indoors, as mosquitoes are more active outside. None of these measures, however, can guarantee non-infection of livestock. Only vaccination can do that.



**TEM micrograph of tissue infected with Rift Valley fever virus**