

# EAN MONTHLY NEWSFLASH

## September Edition

### Get prepared for ESCAIDE !

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*After a little break over the summer, the EAN board have been back in action and busier than normal. Why, might you ask?! ESCAIDE preparations of course!*

*The annual European Scientific Conference for Applied Infectious Disease Epidemiology (ESCAIDE) is running in Stockholm, Sweden, both in-person and online from the **20th to 22nd November this year**. The EAN board is involved in the organisation of several events both prior to and during ESCAIDE and we thought we would use this edition of the newsflash to tell you a little bit more about what's going on behind the scenes as well as some reflections from our board members. Please note the dates below (with exception of the mini module) are all preliminary.*

#### **MOOD Mini module: Monday 18<sup>th</sup> (pm) and Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> (am) November**

Board members Camille and Mona have been helping to organise the pre-ESCAIDE mini module this year. The module, which will be split over two half days (18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> November), will take place at the Public Health Agency of Sweden, Stockholm (Folkhälsomyndigheten).

MOOD stands for "**M**onitoring **O**utbreaks for **D**isease surveillance in data science context) and is a collaborative initiative aimed at improving tools and services for the early detection, assessment, and monitoring of infectious disease threats across Europe. **There are still some spots available but hurry up!** Fees are as follows:

- 25 euros for active members (members with up-to-date membership and current fellows).
- 50 euros for inactive members working in the public sector.
- 100 euros for inactive members working in the private sector and external participants.

Registration for the module is open until the 20<sup>th</sup> October at this link [here](#). We look forward to seeing some of you there!

#### **Dinner and drinks: Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> November**

3!) to keep the tradition going. We are certain Max will be successful so **save the date and watch this space for confirmation of details!**

### **EAN General Assembly: Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> November**

The EAN general assembly is an opportunity for the board to share with you their achievements over the past year. It is also when we celebrate and say a huge thanks to our outgoing board members and ask candidates who would like to put themselves forward for the vacant positions to say a few words about themselves before voting commences. There will be further information released soon about the positions available and eligibility for voting.

### **BarCamp: Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> November**

BarCamp is an in-person discussion forum for ESCAIDE participants to reflect on and share their thoughts and ideas in relation to a range of topics. Do begin to think about topics you would like to hear being discussed as we will ask you to submit these to the virtual ESCAIDE platform for attendees to vote for. Topics are then discussed in order of most votes.

### **Career compass: Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> November**

The Career Compass is a Q&A session about the different career paths of established public health professionals. This event provides the ideal platform to help junior public health professionals to connect with senior professionals and discover future career opportunities. Our president Ioannis and Vice President Jane are working hard to secure another stellar line up for you this year.

### **Best oral presentation: Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> November**

Every year without fail we see a range of fantastic presentations on an array of epidemiological topics. Congratulations to everyone who has been selected to present their work at ESCAIDE this year – whether it be an oral or poster presentation. The board wishes you the very best in your preparations and delivery. Each year there is a prize for the best oral presentation and the EAN board will put out a call for 'secret judges' to help decide the winner soon.

### **Photo contest: Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> November**

Each year, EAN organises a photo contest in which conference attendees can participate and vote for the best photo that transmits the spirit of field epidemiology and public health microbiology. Board member Bojana has been focusing on the preparation for the contest this year. The contest will be launched soon, and we look forward to seeing your individual perspectives and creativity through the lens.

### **Information stand: Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> – Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> November**

Come and say hello to the board during ESCAIDE at our information stand! This year, our treasurers Max and Soledad want to factor in an element of sustainability to our merchandise, so keep an eye out for what we have on offer.

**There's more?...**

diversity in topics and representation across the accepted abstracts and more. There's another thing, but we'll keep that under wraps for now – we can't reveal everything just yet, can we?!

**We hope you are as excited as we are for ESCAIDE this year. To close this edition of the newsflash, we have some reflections from two of our board members Max and Bojana to share with you.**

"ESCAIDE to me means a great time to see friends again that I otherwise don't manage to meet up with regularly! The scientific and personal exchanges mean a lot and I am looking forward to seeing familiar and new faces this year! As board members we are also incredibly busy ahead of the conference organisation a number of side events and not the least also our General Assembly. Please, if you can, make sure you are there to hear what has happened with EAN over the year and get to know the new candidates for the board. Also, swing by at one of my favourite things: our info stand ;) to have a chat, learn about what's going on or, for newcomers, what the FETPs are about!" - *Maximilian Riess, outgoing treasurer*

"The organization of activities for ESCAIDE—the highlight of our professional year—demands considerable preparation and effort. Each day, I reflect on our dedication and the goals we hope to achieve. With adrenaline running high and preparations in full swing, we eagerly anticipate your arrival. Rest assured, we are committed to delivering content of the same exceptional quality you've come to expect over the years." - *Bojana Mahmutovic, secretary*

We look forward to seeing you in Stockholm!

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## Spotlight on Rabies with Dr. Radovan Vodopija

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*Every year on September 28th, the world unites to observe World Rabies Day, a global campaign to raise awareness about rabies prevention and to take action toward eliminating this deadly disease. Rabies remains a serious threat to both human and animal health, particularly in areas with limited access to vaccines and proper healthcare. However, with coordinated global efforts, this disease is 100% preventable.*

*This month, we were privileged to interview **Radovan Vodopija**, MD, PhD, Assistant Professor, Epidemiologist, Research Associate at Andrija Stampar Teaching Institute of Public Health, Zagreb, Croatia, and Head of the Rabies Reference Centre, Ministry of Health, Croatia, who has been at the forefront of efforts to combat rabies throughout his whole career. In this interview, we discussed the significance of*



*eliminating this disease.*

### **Could you update us on the current situation of rabies in Europe?**

Most of the European countries (Austria, Belgium, Czechia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Croatia, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom) are considered to be rabies free. This means that they have put a terrestrial, sylvatic rabies, under control due to performing oral vaccination of foxes against rabies. Unfortunately, that does not cover bat rabies; so we may say that Europe is not *Lyssa virus* free when we are talking about bat rabies.

Most of the European countries are rabies free from canine rabies or dog-mediated rabies. The potential threat in Europe is definitively bat rabies or imported rabies cases.

Four human deaths due to EBLV-1 and EBLV-2 (bat *Lyssaviruses*) have been reported so far in Europe: Ukraine (1977), Russia (1985), Finland (1985) and the UK (2002). Recently, rabies cases appeared in Poland (2021 and 2022); Hungary (2022); Slovakia (2022) and Romania (2021 and 2022). Most of these cases were linked to Moldova and Ukraine, and Russia, respectively.

### **Could you explain the procedure and conditions that must be met to declare a country a rabies-free status?**

A country or area that is free of risk for *Lyssavirus* rabies is defined as one in which: No case of indigenously acquired infection with any *Lyssavirus* has been confirmed in humans or any domestic or wild species, including bats, at any time during the previous 2 years.

The Republic of Croatia started a program of oral vaccination of foxes for the first time in 1991, but it was discontinued due to the Croatian War of Independence in 1995; for the second time in 1998, covering only Zagreb and Zagreb County area; and for the third time in 2010 when only one bait drop campaign was performed. The complete campaign with two bait drops (spring and autumn) was performed in 2011. For that reason, the year 2011, is usually considered as the beginning of the programme of oral vaccination of foxes in the Republic of Croatia. The last case of animal rabies was in 2014 (one fox), and there has not been recorded a single positive rabies case neither in domestic animals nor wildlife since 2015. That also includes bats.

Though it usually takes two years to fulfill the terms for getting a rabies-free status, the Republic of Croatia was officially proclaimed to be a rabies-free country on April 15, 2021; according to the Commission Implementing Decision of the European Union (2021/620).

### **Your father was a renowned and respected professor who dedicated his life to combating rabies in Croatia. One of his most significant achievements was the recognition of the Zagreb vaccination scheme against rabies, which was officially included in the World Health Organization's list of approved vaccination programs. Could you share more about the development of this scheme?**

The Zagreb 2-1-1 scheme or Zagreb regimen for rabies post-exposure prophylaxis in humans against rabies, was invented in 1980 or 1981 (I do not know the right year, but one of these two years must have been the start). The author of this vaccination scheme

improve a better immune response in severely bitten patients with a high risk of rabies infection. That was definitively the leading idea. The second thing was, that in that time (period from 1980 and further) many vaccine failures have been recorded worldwide, despite receiving a full course of 6-dose rabies vaccines (e.g. Essen scheme) on days: 0, 3, 7, 14, 28 (30) and 90.

The seroconversion rate in the Essen scheme was 100% by day 30. My father, Professor Ivan Janko Vodopija, wanted to decrease the rabies protection to below 30 days. In the Zagreb 2-1-1 scheme, two doses of rabies vaccines are given in both deltoid muscles via i.m. route; the third dose after seven days (from the first two doses), and the last, the fourth dose, is given on day 21.

The seroconversion rate of Zagreb 2-1-1 was confirmed in Pasteur Institute, Paris, France to be 100% by day 14; one more dose of rabies vaccine still had to be given on day 21. Later, this seroconversion was confirmed in several official WHO rabies laboratories worldwide. The very first results of the Zagreb 2-1-1 scheme were officially presented at Dubrovnik, 1984, at the rabies congress under the auspices of the World Health Organization. A year later, in 1985, my father published a book: "Improvements in rabies post-exposure treatment", where all present authors from the world (at that time!), presented their works and trials with new, modern concentrated and purified cell culture-derived vaccines and embryonated eggs rabies vaccines.

Zagreb Rabies Clinic, at that time, used (later published and presented at the congress in Dubrovnik) all the present rabies vaccines for human post-exposure treatment; the vaccine made on human diploid cells (HDC vaccine), the vaccine produced on chick cell embryo vaccine (Rabipur vaccine), the vaccine produced on purified duck cells (PDEV), the vaccine produced on Vero cells (VERO vaccine), vaccine produced on fetal bovine kidney cells (FBKV).

In 1986, my father received a letter from Pasteur Institute in Paris, France, that they were going to accept the Zagreb 2-1-1 scheme, as a vaccine for rabies post-exposure treatment of humans in France. In 1992, the World Health Organization put the Zagreb 2-1-1 scheme in their official protocol for rabies protection in humans. However, as an experimental scheme it took several years for full recognition, but it was a great success. For this great achievement, my father and his team were awarded an Annual Award of the City of Zagreb in 1996.

For a very small country, such as the Republic of Croatia, this was one of the greatest achievements in human rabies protection and a permanent tribute for marking World Rabies Days.

**On September 28, 2024, we celebrate World Rabies Day. This year, what is the theme for the day, and what activities are planned to mark the occasion?**

Rabies still represents a big public health problem in many countries and regions worldwide. It is almost 100% fatal and with an incidence of 60,000 deaths annually, predominantly in Asia and Africa. 40% of all fatal rabies outcomes are in children.

This year's logo for marking World Rabies Day 2024 is: "Breaking rabies boundaries". That means that countries and regions with high incidence of rabies have to have a goal for the elimination of dog-mediated rabies (that means that more than 70% of dogs of known owners have to be vaccinated against rabies because that will decrease the human fatality rate numbers!) for a definite goal worldwide: "to eliminate human rabies deaths by 2030".

the end of this year, on December 10, 2024, we are going to make a small rabies symposium: "60 years (1964 – 2024) without human rabies case in the Republic of Croatia: luck, coincidence or success?" There, we are going to talk and present things from the past from a human and veterinarian perspective, which led to the present status of the Republic of Croatia: a rabies-free country.

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## EAN celebrated World Rabies Day 2024

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**Lina Chaito (MediEPIET C4)** is an epidemiologist, holder of a master in public health (Epidemiology & Biostatistics). Since 2012, she has been working at the epidemiological surveillance unit of the Lebanese Ministry of Public Health. In 2021, she joined the cohort 4 fellows for two years in The Mediterranean and Black Sea Programme for Intervention Epidemiology Training (MediPIET). The experience was exceptional and significant opening new perspective in her career path.



In 2024, she joined the GOARN Berlin Fellowship Program and relocated in Berlin for 6 months. The fellowship was an opportunity to work closely with experts from Robert Koch Institute (RKI), WHO Collaborating Center for GOARN (ZIG1) and WHO Hub for Pandemic and Epidemic Intelligence on a project aiming to enhance rabies surveillance in Lebanon. Rabies is a public health threat in Lebanon. In the past years, there was increase in reported human rabies cases. Challenges in rabies control and prevention are multiple in Lebanon such as: limited budget for both Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) and Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), delay in rabies exposure reporting, lack of awareness about rabies threat among public especially in rural areas.

This project aims to enhance epidemic intelligence activities in Lebanon in the context of rabies surveillance. Early detection of rabies exposure is essential for public health and animal management. Thus, one of the project aspects is focusing on training surveillance teams at the provincial level on epidemic intelligence activities with focus on targeted social media screening. Trained teams will be equipped with relevant tools and SOPs to conduct their daily work. We will benefit from established communications with municipalities in Lebanon to extend local sources of social media screening.

Other aspects will focus on enhancing rabies surveillance reports including risk mapping and raising awareness about rabies threats in the general population.

**See our post and follow us on Instagram !!!**

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## connected!

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### Do what you love to do!

You'd like to get active on a project for our community? An experience you'd like to share or a topic you'd like to educate on? Please reach out to us at [eanboard@gmail.com](mailto:eanboard@gmail.com) if you'd like to discuss your idea and want our support. We are available to help you bringing your ideas come to life.

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### Support us with mini-assignments

Our community lives from all of us and the capacities of the board alone are limited. Every now and then, we may reach out to ask for your help on specific tasks or activities to get the best out of it for all of us.

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### Activate your membership

Many benefits are lined up for active members of the network (GOARN requests of assistance, bulletins, discounts on mini-modules, access to specific resources on our website...).

Membership runs from Nov. 1 until Oct 31 of the following year - but you can activate your membership at anytime! **The annual membership fee is now €30 / £28. There is a 10-year membership available at €250 / £230.**

Fellows in their first and second year of training are exempt from paying membership fees. We have added a new payment option for credit cards to make membership renewal a bit easier. To use this option, please go to our website and follow the instructions there.

The details for how to transfer fees by online banking are also on the [EAN webpage](#); if you require any further information on membership payment, we kindly ask you to contact the EAN board ([eanboard@gmail.com](mailto:eanboard@gmail.com)), putting "membership payment" in the subject line.

Please indicate your name and membership year as reference in the bank transfer and also send an email to [eanboard@gmail.com](mailto:eanboard@gmail.com) with a copy of the receipt/invoice to inform us about your payment (sometimes names are not correctly transmitted with the transfer). Thank you for your support!

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