

BIOSECURITY ALERT

Hendra virus—information for the community

20 August 2009

Hendra virus – general information

Hendra virus is a rare cause of disease in horses and humans and is not related to equine influenza.

The few cases of Hendra virus infection in humans have been the result of very close contact with horses infected with the virus.

Most cases involving horses are fatal but occasionally a horse will survive the infection.

Dealing with Hendra virus involves important public health and workplace health and safety issues, and requires careful management.

Biosecurity Queensland routinely tests horses to eliminate the possibility of Hendra virus infection. Only 12 incidents of Hendra virus occurring have been recorded since the virus was first discovered in 1994—11 of these have been in Queensland and one in New South Wales.

Hendra virus is a serious disease and Biosecurity Queensland, Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries (QPIF), must be notified of any cases of suspected Hendra virus via the Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline on 1800 675 888.

Hendra virus at Cawarral—the current situation?

Results from the first round of samples taken from 25 horses at the Cawarral property outside Rockhampton and nine horses that have recently moved off the property are negative for Hendra virus infection at this point.

However, it is necessary to wait for the results from the next round of testing before a complete assessment of the status of all the horses can be made.

Biosecurity Queensland will conduct further testing in the coming weeks which will

eliminate the possibility of further Hendra infections.

Results for another two horses that left the affected property before the quarantine are still ongoing.

One horse is undergoing further testing and advice on results from the final horse that was traced to New South Wales is yet to be received.

The Cawarral property and a neighbouring property will remain under quarantine until such time as Biosecurity Queensland is completely confident there is no chance of any further infection. It is expected this will be at least another three weeks.

Biosecurity Queensland has engaged independent reviewer Dr Nigel Perkins to audit procedures being used as part of the response.

This follows one of the recommendations from the Perkins Review of last year Hendra incidents and is a proactive way of ensuring there is continuous improvement on Hendra responses.

Hendra virus – the facts

- Hendra virus is a cause of sporadic disease in horses and humans, and is not related to equine influenza or rabies.
- While Hendra virus is present in flying fox populations, the risk of horses being infected is very low.
- In previous situations where Hendra virus has been confirmed, no cases of the infection have been found in animals other than horses.
- The few cases of Hendra virus infection in humans have been the result of very close contact with horses infected with the virus. Body fluids or secretions from an infected animal are likely to contain the virus.
- There is no evidence of human-to-human spread of Hendra virus.



- Since 1994, Hendra virus has been confirmed only 12 times involving about 40 horses and 6 humans.
- Hendra virus is normally carried by flying foxes; however, these animals should not be targeted for unnecessary culling. These animals are critical to our environment. They pollinate our native trees and spread seeds. Without them, we wouldn't have our eucalypt forests, rainforests and melaleucas.

Advice to horse owners

Managing Hendra virus does not involve movement restrictions for the general horse population. Movement is only restricted for properties under quarantine for Hendra virus.

Horse movements to events and other activities, including mixing of horses, can continue, however, sound biosecurity measures should be practiced. More information can be found on the QPIF website at www.dpi.qld.gov.au

People working with horses, such as farriers, equine dentists and chiropractors, strappers, vets, or feed delivery merchants should also follow sound biosecurity procedures.

Contact your local veterinarian if you notice changes in the health of your horses or suspect they may be infected with Hendra virus.

Where Hendra virus is suspected as the cause of illness or death in horses, Biosecurity Queensland should be contacted immediately.

Can humans contract Hendra virus?

The few recorded cases of Hendra virus infection in humans have been the result of very close contact with horses infected with the virus.

Biosecurity Queensland contacts Queensland Health whenever Hendra virus is confirmed or strongly suspected and there is a risk of human exposure to the virus. Queensland Health then works with the horse owner to decide whether any people require monitoring and medical assistance.

There is no evidence of human-to-human spread or human-to-horse spread of Hendra virus.

More information

Notify suspected Hendra virus cases by contacting:

- QPIF on 13 25 23 (during business hours)
- the Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline on 1800 675 888 (24-hour hotline).

Contact the Queensland Health Hotline on 13 Health (432584) if you have concerns about possible exposure of people to Hendra virus.

More information is available at www.dpi.qld.gov.au where you can subscribe to the Hendra virus e-newsletter update.