



Workplace Health and Safety Queensland

SAFETY ALERT

Hendra virus – Information for horse properties and other horse related businesses

Purpose

The purpose of this alert is to inform horse properties and other horse related businesses of the risks surrounding Hendra virus and preventative measures to minimise the risk of human infection.

Background

Hendra virus is a rare disease of horses and humans that can cause serious and life threatening illness. The natural hosts of Hendra virus are bats (flying foxes) which can then pass the virus onto horses. Human infection results from close contact with the blood, body fluids and tissues of infected or dead horses. There is no evidence of human to human spread of Hendra virus.

Hendra virus infection of horses can include rapid onset of illness, increased body temperature, increased heart rate, discomfort or weight shifting between legs, depression, respiratory and neurological signs. Not all of these signs will be found in any one infected horse.

Risk

Hendra virus outbreaks are rare. However, the potential seriousness of the disease for both humans and horses requires that workplace health and safety measures to prevent infection should be implemented at workplaces where there is occupational contact with horses.

Infected horses may shed Hendra virus before showing clinical signs of illness, and by the time a horse becomes ill the virus may be widespread in the horse's body and body fluids.

It is therefore important that sound hygiene and biosecurity (animal disease control) measures are adopted as a routine work practice for all horse contact. Further information on biosecurity can be obtained from [Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries](#) or a veterinarian.

Prevention

Hendra virus requires careful risk management. You should consider developing a plan for responding to a suspect, highly suspect or confirmed case of Hendra virus at your workplace, including how you will minimise the risk to yourself, your workers and others such as visiting horse practitioners (farriers, etc.). You should then train your workers in the implementation of the plan.

You should also consider the following measures:

- Take steps to protect horses from becoming infected with Hendra virus, such as by placing feed bins and water troughs away from areas where bats feed or roost.
- Ensure safe systems of work as a routine work practice for all contact with horses, their blood and body fluids and associated equipment. This includes regular hand hygiene, maintaining standards of cleanliness and stable hygiene, and cleaning and disinfecting equipment that has been in contact with the body fluids of horses.
- If you have a sick horse, isolate the horse from other horses, people and animals (for example remove companion animals to

another area) until you have obtained a veterinary opinion.

- Avoid close contact with a sick horse where possible. If this is unavoidable, consider the horse's blood and body fluids as potentially infectious and take precautions to prevent contact with these. Use personal protective equipment (PPE) to protect your clothing, exposed skin and face from contact with the horse's blood and body fluids. If this includes PPE that you and your workers are not familiar with, such as particulate respirators, provide training in its correct use. Cover cuts and abrasions with a water-resistant dressing and follow instructions for biosecurity and personal safety provided by a Biosecurity Queensland officer or veterinarian.
- If you have handled a sick horse, and before contact with other horses, wash off any contamination with plenty of soap and water, shower and wash your hair and change your clothes. Arrange your activities so that you have contact with the sick horse last.
- Always consider Hendra virus as a possible cause of illness in horses. Notify suspected Hendra virus cases by contacting Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries on **13 25 23** or the Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline on **1800 675 888**. There is a legal obligation to notify.
- Seek medical advice or ring Queensland Health **13 HEALTH** (1300 43 25 84) if you or a worker has had contact with a horse suspected or confirmed as being infected with Hendra virus.

Further information

For more information on workplace health and safety relating to occupational diseases visit www.worksafe.qld.gov.au or call the Workplace Health and Safety Infoline on 1300 369 915.

Visit the website to download the Safety alert: [Hendra virus - Information for veterinarians](#).

More information on Hendra virus in horses is also available from the Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries at www.dpi.qld.gov.au or call 13 25 23, or your veterinarian.

Visit the DPI website to download more information for:

- veterinarians
- horse owners
- horse industries
- communities.

For more information on Hendra virus in humans contact Queensland Health at www.health.qld.gov.au or 13 HEALTH (1300 43 25 84).

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