

10 July 2013

Hendra Virus confirmed at Kempsey and Macksville

Hendra Virus infection has been confirmed in three unvaccinated horses on three separate and unrelated properties in the Kempsey and Macksville area in the period 5-10 July 2013. None of the properties are linked by any movements and it is likely that flying foxes in flowering or fruiting trees were the source of all of these cases.

The owners of each of the horses contacted their local veterinarians. In each case, the veterinarians considered Hendra virus as a possible cause. Samples were submitted to the State Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory and tested positive for Hendra virus infection.

All properties are quarantined to prevent the spread of the virus. Following a property assessment, any close contact horses on the properties are vaccinated and monitored for 20 days. As well as protecting animals from getting Hendra virus infection, vaccination reduces virus shedding making the animal less infectious. Companion animals on the three properties that had close contact with an infected horse have been sampled and will be monitored.

Initial results from all close contact animals on the Macksville and the first Kempsey property are negative.

NSW Health has been advised and is providing advice to people who had contact with the horses.

The quarantine has been lifted from the property at Macksville where Hendra virus was confirmed in a horse on 7 June 2013. Decontamination and testing of close contact animals has been completed with no evidence of Hendra virus infection.

Biosecurity Precautions

Detection of Hendra virus in four unvaccinated horses in the last month is a reminder to horse owners and people who handle horses to take appropriate precautions.

If you notice symptoms of Hendra virus including fever, signs of colic, nervous and respiratory symptoms, abnormal behaviour or unexpected deaths keep everyone away from the horse and call your private veterinarian immediately. Other animals including dogs should also be kept away. The vet will notify the local Livestock Health and Pest Authority or an inspector with DPI, if they consider the case highly suspect for Hendra. If they are unavailable, and the illness is progressing rapidly, call the Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline on **1800 675 888**.

Even if a horse is vaccinated against Hendra virus, as no vaccine is 100 per cent effective, and because horses are susceptible to a range of viruses, it is important that vets and others in contact with sick horses continue to protect themselves by using gloves, masks and eye protection, and carefully washing their hands after contact with sick animals.

Hendra Vaccination

Horse owners and managers are strongly encouraged to vaccinate their horses against Hendra virus. **It is the single most effective way of reducing the risk of Hendra virus infection in both horses and humans.** Human infection and deaths have occurred following high-level exposure to body fluids from infected horses. Vaccinating horses is an important measure to prevent this occurring and provides a public health and workplace health and safety benefit.

The vaccine is currently available under a limited permit and must be administered by a veterinarian. With over 30,000 doses administered across Australia to date, current data indicates that the vaccine is safe and side effects minimal.

Contact your veterinarian for further details about the vaccine.

Further Information

See the DPI website:

- Press release on use of vaccine at <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/aboutus/news/all/2013/owners-encouraged-to-vaccinate-their-horses-against-hendra>
- Hendra virus web page at <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/livestock/horses/health/general/hendra-virus>

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Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (10 July 2013). However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that information upon which they rely is up to date and to check currency of the information with the appropriate officer of NSW Department Primary Industries or the user's independent adviser.

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