

Biosecurity – Hendra virus investigation and management

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Scope:

The *Biosecurity Act 2015* (the Act) promotes biosecurity as a shared responsibility between government, industry and communities. This procedure is a State Priority for NSW and should be read in conjunction with the policy 'Prohibited matter sporadic pests and diseases of animals'. The procedure applies to the NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (NSW DPIRD), and Local Land Services (LLS) in their role as authorised officers (AOs) under the Act.

This procedure was developed jointly by NSW DPIRD and LLS and is based on an assessment of the risks associated with Hendra virus.

Management of the biosecurity risk

Hendra virus is a Biosafety level 4 zoonotic agent that is endemic in flying foxes in Australia. Occasionally it spreads from bats to horses. These incidents are termed spillover infections. Infected horses have caused human infection and death. Infection may also be spread to other species.

The purpose of this procedure is to set out how to manage suspected or confirmed Hendra virus infection incidents in animals other than bats. The aim in managing these cases is to minimise risks to human health, the horse industry, and trade associated with Hendra virus and ensure animal welfare is addressed.

Biosecurity legislation summary

Hendra virus (except in bats) is listed as prohibited matter in Schedule 2 of the Act. This means that a person who owns or is in charge of any non-bat animal species, or a person such as a veterinarian in their professional capacity, has a duty to immediately notify an authorised officer when Hendra virus infection is suspected or confirmed in any non-bat animal species.

Under section 28 of the Act it is an offence for people to deal with prohibited matter. In the context of Hendra virus, this means that it is an offence for people to do anything that is described in section

12 of the Act as dealing with, which includes moving, selling or treating any non-bat animal species infected with Hendra virus, unless the person could not have reasonably known that they were dealing with Hendra virus. Note that the Secretary (or delegate) can issue a prohibited matter permit that authorises specific dealings with prohibited matter in non-bat species suspected of being infected with Hendra virus, subject to specific conditions.

Under the Act any person (such as horse owner or manager, trainer, veterinarian) who deals with potential Hendra virus carriers such as horses, or other associated carriers (such as equipment) and who knows or ought to know of the biosecurity risks associated with Hendra virus has a general biosecurity duty to take measures to prevent, eliminate or minimise the risk as far as is reasonably practicable.

Potential ways to discharge this biosecurity duty include:

- actions to minimise horses becoming infected with the Hendra virus, such as vaccination of at-risk horses
- regular monitoring of animals for signs of disease
- immediate notification of suspected disease
- isolation of a potentially infected animal, carrier or premises
- disinfection of potentially infected items
- making and maintaining records to assist in disease tracing
- appropriate disposal of potentially infected things, such as of infected carcasses or clinical waste

See the [NSW DPIRD Hendra virus web page](#) for information on suggested Hendra virus risk mitigation measures.

Disclosure of information

The collection, use and disclosure of information in accordance with this procedure, including any internal or external discussion or distribution of information, must be in accordance with the Privacy and *Personal Information Protection Act 1998* or be in accordance with section 387 of the *Biosecurity Act 2015*.

Section 387 (2) of the Act provides authority for the disclosure of information about a person, without the consent of the person:

- to a public sector agency, or
 - to any other person, but only if the disclosure is reasonably necessary for the purpose of exercising a biosecurity risk function
-

Work health and safety

The *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* places an obligation on the agency (NSW DPIRD and LLS) as a person conducting a business or undertaking and workers to provide a safe and healthy workplace. Safe Work Method Statements that support activities included in this procedure must be used in identifying, assessing and controlling risks.

NSW DPIRD and LLS will work together to create a safe and supportive work environment when undertaking any activities for this procedure.

These activities may require personnel to operate in an environment and/or locations that are unfamiliar and sometimes isolated (by time and space) which may pose a higher level of risk to their health, safety and wellbeing than normal work environments. Situations may be affected by different environmental and other hazards which must be identified and suitably addressed.

Hendra virus infection is a potentially fatal, zoonotic disease. Further information relevant to human health is available in the [NSW Health Hendra virus factsheet](#) or by contacting the [NSW Public Health Unit](#).

NSW DPIRD or LLS field staff must undertake a pre-ops site inspection before undertaking any field operations.

Sample collection, vaccination, health monitoring or other activities that involve animals may on occasions involve significant safety issues. Under no circumstances should the health or welfare of animals or people be compromised while undertaking these activities. Personnel handling animals must follow recommended safety policies and procedures.

Assistance by expert animal handlers may be necessary to complete some tasks. Animals being handled (especially for invasive procedures) must be adequately restrained (physical and/or chemical) to minimise the risk of kicks, bites, scratches etc. and potential exposure to a dangerous zoonotic agent. Handling including examination or sampling should not be undertaken unless the risk of personal contamination/injury can be adequately managed.

Travel to and from the site by motor vehicle may be hazardous e.g. driving at dawn or dusk, rising flood water, mud or gravel roads. Refer to [Driving and travel](#) for more information.

Personnel must be monitored regularly and systematically to ensure their health, safety and well-being is not adversely affected. Action must be taken if adverse effects of the field activities are identified.

Operational plans must be developed for the task that identify and address risks. Field activity plans/risk assessments must account for (as a minimum) fatigue, working environment (hot, cold), task(s) being conducted, locality, isolation, communication access, medical plan information, team size and experience of personnel.

Personnel must be trained to perform the task and/or be supervised by an experienced person.

Personnel may be required to interact with people suffering trauma as a result of a Hendra virus incident. These people may be stressed, tired, irritable and irrational. Refer to [NSW Public health](#) where appropriate.

Other people may be in the vicinity of the operation, so efforts should be made to limit their exposure to actions such as destruction and disposal.

Personnel must consider biosecurity when moving between properties. Refer to the following SWMS – [Property visits](#) and [Risk assessment – Maintaining biosecurity entering and exiting properties](#)

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1. Roles and responsibilities

NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (Animal Biosecurity Unit) will:

- notify NSW Health when
 - an animal is confirmed to be infected, or is strongly suspected to have Hendra virus, or
 - there has been high risk human contact with a strongly suspect horse
- make available advisory material on Hendra virus and associated infection risk mitigation to:
 - owners/managers of susceptible animals
 - those who work with susceptible animals
 - event organisers
 - private veterinarians
 - NSW DPI and LLS staff
- make recommendations to the NSW DPI Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO) for euthanasia of an infected animal where it is assessed that the case poses an unacceptable public health or disease transmission risk.

LLS authorised officers must:

- train in risk assessment, use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and entry and exit procedures
- identify, assess and control risks (by elimination or minimisation)
- use appropriate and correctly fitting PPE during all investigations
- audit field investigation kits regularly including any perishables for expiry date.
- notify their supervisor of any defect or deficiency in the PPE
- maintain oversight of any suspect Hendra notifications they receive to ensure sampling and submission to the laboratory occurs if required. This may involve sampling by AOs where safe and feasible
- provide advice (referencing advisory material) where requested by a private practitioner on PPE, sampling and submission of samples and risk mitigation
- report notifications of suspected Hendra virus infection as per the Procedure – Reporting notifiable pests and diseases of animals
- if appropriate notify laboratory staff of the expected delivery time of samples sent for Hendra virus testing
- contact laboratory or EAD hotline staff to facilitate prompt testing of urgent samples
- if involved in assisting sampling of live animals, the animals must be adequately restrained/sedated

- assess the risk of spread to humans and to other animals, and take steps or provide written advice to minimise any assessed risk following the collection of exclusion samples
- promptly report any potential exposure, such as needle stick injury, to NSW Public Health unit
- shower using shampoo and soap after contact with a potentially infected animals, its body fluids or anything contaminated with Hendra virus
- enter details of investigations, advice, test results and regulatory actions in the approved property-based disease recording system.
- undertake property investigations including tracing to identify at risk animals or potentially contaminated lands or things
- organise sampling of suspect response animals if required
- issue biosecurity directions
- provide the owner/person in charge of the animal(s) on Infected Premise (IPs), Dangerous Contact Premises (DCPs) and Trace premises (TPs) with a copy of:
 - 'Response to Hendra virus infection in animals',
 - Hendra virus - Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and decontamination procedures for property owners
 - 'Waiting for Hendra test results'.
- collect property information for IPs, DCPs and TPs
- assign Hendra virus statuses to premises
- assess the need for epidemiological assessments and organise if required
- assess susceptible species on the property and classify into risk groups
- ensure signs/tape are erected to clearly identify potentially contaminated areas
- oversee decontamination
- issue persons in charge of close contact or other high-risk animals with PPE and provide initial instruction/ training in its use
- supervise safe disposal of suspect or infected carcasses

NSW DPIRD and LLS managers must:

- ensure that their staff are trained in this procedure, risk assessment, entry and exit procedures and the use of PPE
- ensure that their staff are briefed on the technical aspects of Hendra virus infection and its prevention
- ensure that WHS responsibilities and accountabilities in their area of control are well defined and known by all staff

Animal owners or managers should:

- implement strategies to minimise the risk that susceptible animals become exposed to Hendra virus
- monitor the health of their animals and contact their private veterinarians if their animal is unwell
- implement strategies to minimise the risk of spread of infection from an animal infected with Hendra virus

*A person who suspects an animal is infected with Hendra virus must notify a NSW DPIRD or LLS authorised officer **immediately**.*

Event organisers should:

- develop (including consultation with veterinarians) and implement plans to:
 - mitigate the risk of an animal becoming infected with Hendra virus at an event
 - mitigate the risk of the spread of Hendra virus from an infected animal at an event
- assist NSW DPIRD and LLS staff to investigate and manage infection risks where a suspect animal is identified at an event
- assist NSW Health to trace persons who may have been exposed to Hendra virus where a suspect animal is identified at an event

Private veterinarians should:

- be familiar with the technical resource publications [Hendra virus information for veterinarians](#) and [Guidelines for veterinary personal biosecurity](#)
- develop, train in, and implement Hendra virus case investigation procedures and infection control protocols, including use of appropriate PPE, entry and exit procedures and dispatch of samples to the laboratory for animals suspected to be infected with Hendra virus
- provide advice to animal owners to reduce their potential exposure and to minimise the risk of further spread of infection until testing results are available. Give the owner a copy of the Primefact [Hendra-Waiting for test results](#)
- seek additional assistance from a NSW DPIRD or LLS veterinarian on the investigation or management of an animal potentially infected with Hendra virus as required
- collect and submit appropriate samples for Hendra virus testing
- notify the NSW Animal and Plant Health Laboratories (APHL) on 1800 675 623 when samples are being submitted

2. Work health and safety for Hendra virus

In addition to the general WHS information mentioned earlier additional Hendra specific considerations including more details about animal handling and PPE see [Primefact Hendra virus – PPE for property owners](#) and [Primefact WHS information for vets](#).

2.1 Animal Handling

All contact with animals potentially infected with Hendra virus must be kept to a minimum.

Animals must be assessed prior to handling to identify how they can be effectively restrained. Handling including examination or sampling should not be undertaken unless the risk of personal contamination/injury can be adequately managed.

2.2 Personal protective equipment (PPE)

The following PPE is required by all people involved in animal handling or potentially exposed to Hendra virus contaminated land or things:

- impervious boots
- splash proof overalls (impervious overalls may result in heat stress if working in direct sunlight)
- double gloves (nitrile) and taped to overalls at the wrists to provide a continuous barrier
- face shield or goggles to protect against splashes
- respiratory protection using a P2 respirator. For bearded people powered respirators are required as ordinary face masks do not seal adequately. Face masks must be fit tested before use as all brands are not universal fitting

2.3 Post operations

Shower with soap after contact with a potentially infected animal, its body fluids or anything contaminated with Hendra virus.

3. Notification and reporting

A person who suspects an animal is infected with Hendra virus must notify a NSW DPIRD or LLS authorised officer immediately. Notifications of suspected Hendra virus infection may be made by contacting an authorised officer by calling the Emergency Animal Disease Hotline on 1800 675 888 or LLS on 1300 795 299.

Notifications of suspected Hendra infection must be reported and assessed as per the Procedure - Reporting notifiable pests and diseases of animals.

4. Laboratory diagnostics

NSW DPIRD (Laboratory Services) Hendra virus sets out the preferred sampling protocol for Hendra virus. A full vacutainer of blood collected into an EDTA treated tube and separate nasal swabs from each nostril in PBGS sent chilled are the preferred diagnostic samples. Additional clotted blood and plain swabs from the oral, vaginal or rectal mucosal surfaces in PBGS can increase diagnostic sensitivity.

Contact NSW APHL on 1800 675 623 for advice on sampling.

When sampling:

- involve a minimum number of people during sampling
- collect a range of samples from the one animal as it will increase the confidence in test results
- minimise contact with the animal and any blood or secretions while handling/sampling
- avoid standing in front of the horse/animal where possible
- collect blood/tissue samples last
- EDTA treated and clotted blood samples are preferred for PCR rather than lithium heparin treated blood which may interfere with PCRs. Gel tubes are also not suitable for Hendra blood samples for PCR.
- submit swabs chilled in PBGS or if unavailable 1-2ml of saline. Do not use solid transport media as it can be inhibitory for PCRs
- do not recap needles; put used needles and scalpels straight into a sharps container and consider using retractable needles
- use a new scalpel blade for any incisions
- ensure companion animals are restrained

If dissecting out a jugular clot or submandibular lymph node:

- use blunt dissection
 - handle the clot and lymph nodes using forceps
 - cut high on the neck, so that when disposing of the carcass, the incision can be enclosed in a bag placed over the head.
-

5.1 Sampling for routine Hendra virus exclusion

For safety and animal welfare reasons, examination and sampling of suspect live animals is best undertaken by private veterinarians. They can provide more restraint options and wider diagnostic

and treatment services while collecting samples to exclude or confirm Hendra virus infection. Where LLS staff investigate possible Hendra virus cases the owner/manager must be advised that examination and sampling will be limited to Hendra virus exclusion testing only.

Prompt sampling of animals that are suspected to be infected with Hendra virus may be facilitated by:

- requesting the owner to engage a private veterinarian to sample the animal
- tasking a private veterinarian to undertake sampling on behalf of NSW DPIRD would only be considered after a risk assessment concluded that high level human exposure has occurred and the owner is unwilling to engage a private veterinarian to undertake sampling.
- sampling by LLS biosecurity staff of suspect dead horses only where private vet sampling is not available.

6. Packaging and submission of samples

Information on packaging of specimens is available in the NSW APHL [laboratory services customer services page](#). Hendra sample testing out of hours is only required in limited circumstances where the case is considered high risk after risk assessment by NSW DPIRD. Examples would include:

- where there is a significant disease transmission risk e.g. race meeting or equestrian event, or
- where significant potential human exposure has occurred (e.g. needlestick injury) and NSW Health would be anticipated to recommend urgent post exposure treatment be given if the horse is positive

Additional information on submitting samples to government laboratories and prioritisation of testing is found in the procedure [Prohibited matter Animal Pests and Diseases – Investigation and Alert Phase](#).

7. Risk mitigation after notification of suspected Hendra virus infection

Staff who provide risk management advice to horse owners or veterinarians about suspect cases, should state that the NSW DPIRD/LLS is not taking responsibility for on-going case management from the owner/veterinarian. A copy of the Primefact [Waiting for Hendra virus test results](#) should be supplied. Human health concerns should be referred to [NSW Public Health Unit](#).

Where NSW DPIRD or LLS staff conduct field investigations on premises where Hendra infection is suspected, staff must:

- assess the risk of spread to humans and to other animals
- take steps or provide written advice to minimise any assessed risk

The first step must always be to minimise any potential human health risk. However, the risk assessments must also consider the welfare needs of the animals involved. Possible actions to mitigate risk include:

- restricting movements of animals or animal products off the property
- isolation of suspect animals
- facilitate isolation or appropriate disposal of carcass
- advice and provision of PPE to the owner/manager if ongoing contact with a suspect animal is required
- isolation and decontamination of equipment, fixtures or land
- management of contaminated waste.

Premises that are strongly suspected to contain an infected animal may be subject to a biosecurity undertaking or an individual biosecurity direction.

8. Liaison with NSW Health

NSW Health must be notified immediately when:

- an animal is confirmed to be infected, or
- an animal is strongly suspected to have Hendra virus based on the history and examination, or
- there has been high risk human contact with a suspect horse

The local public health unit will be notified by NSW Health. The animal owner and attending private veterinarian should be encouraged to contact the public health unit in cases where human exposure is of concern. Discussion of the case with the DPIRD Horse coordinator prior to notification is recommended.

The NSW DPIRD CVO/DCVO will notify the Director of One Health, Health Protection NSW.

9. Notification of laboratory results

Reporting of laboratory results will be in accordance with the Procedure - 'Reporting prohibited Matter, Notifiable Pests and Diseases and other Biosecurity Events'

10. Record keeping

All events including investigations, laboratory reports and advice must be entered into the approved property based disease recording system e.g. Livestock Health Management System (LHMS). This includes risk assessments and discussions with private veterinarians about the case.

11. Issuing of regulatory instruments

Legal authority for disease control activities is derived from the Act. See Procedure - Biosecurity Directions.

11.1 Biosecurity directions for Hendra virus incidents

An authorised officer will issue a biosecurity direction to prevent a risk of Hendra virus exposure or transmission on Infected Premises (IP), Dangerous Contact Premises (DCP) and in other situations where significant biosecurity risks are identified. The suspicion or confirmation of Hendra virus infection is regarded as an emergency situation (section 131 of the Act).

An individual biosecurity direction can be given to a person such as the owner or occupier of a property to take certain actions to, for example, prevent a risk of Hendra virus exposure. Alternatively, a general biosecurity direction may be given by an authorised officer with the appropriate approval when a Hendra virus risk is identified at, for example, an event, and all requirements for publication and communication to the relevant persons are complied with.

A template for completing an individual biosecurity direction in the case of an emergency to use when managing Hendra virus incidents is in CM as INT19/113101.

When Hendra virus infection is first suspected or confirmed on a holding, knowledge about risk groups and potentially contaminated areas will be limited and the initial biosecurity direction will predominantly be about movement control at the property level. As more information is gained from interviews with owners, risk groups and potentially contaminated areas will be identified.

Subsequent biosecurity directions can then address the management of risks groups and identify how potentially contaminated areas can be managed including identifying entry and exit points and PPE and decontamination requirements on any people moving into or out of these areas.

When giving and writing biosecurity directions:

- provide a warning that it **is an emergency situation** (allows people control under the Bio Act)
- ensure the spelling of names is correct and addresses are current
- ensure the holding is correctly identified using the property identification code (PIC) and/or street address.
- fully describe the details of all restricted activities (such as close contact horses are not to be ridden or must be fed from a minimum distance of five metres)
- designate where specific activities must be undertaken e.g. the close contact group must be kept in the area designated “xx” on the attached property map
- specify the relevant Standard Operating Procedure relating to any requirement for disinfection
- consider other property activities and the extent of potential contamination to minimise unnecessary restrictions whilst preventing spread of infection. For example, do not hinder necessary activities provided contact with all close contact animals, contaminated areas and items can be avoided
- issue the direction to the person in apparent control of the premises (owner, occupier or a person who is leasing or managing the premises) and provide a copy to all other relevant parties. For example, owners who agist animals on the premises

- fully brief the persons in charge and other relevant parties listed above on the conditions in any legal instruments

The biosecurity direction must:

- include a warning that it is an emergency situation
- specify the species of animals to which the direction applies
- specify the animal products, equipment, fittings and vehicles to which the biosecurity direction applies
- provide an indication of the likely period the restrictions will apply for (typically less than 28 days)
- define contaminated areas and the designated entry/exit points to these areas
- specify location for signs indicating the property is restricted
- require a log to be maintained of all personnel and equipment entering the contaminated area(s)
- require all persons leaving a contaminated area to decontaminate and remove contaminated clothing and PPE before entering clean areas in accordance with EM Resources
- require all vehicles, items and equipment leaving the contaminated area to be decontaminated/disinfected, in accordance with Decontamination of vehicles and equipment and Personal decontamination
- specify the manner of destruction of any items to be destroyed
- record the name/identification of all animals that have been classified as infected, suspect response or a close contact animals
- require contact with infected, suspect response or close contact animals to be limited to essential tasks
- require persons in charge of any infected, suspect response or close contact animals to prevent children having contact with these animals
- restrict the movement of all susceptible animals within and off a holding including instructions to:
 - move animals out of contaminated areas
 - check and repair fences as required
 - confine any infected or suspect response animal in specified designated areas separate from low-risk animals
 - confine close contacted horses in specified designated areas separate from low-risk animals until monitoring and testing is complete
 - confine close contact companion animals in specified designated areas separately from humans and other animals until monitoring and testing is complete
- include a property map showing high risk/contaminated areas, entry and exit points and the location of risk groups

- note the names of owners or managers who have been issued with PPE and provided with training in its use
- require any person to wear PPE if going within:
 - five metres of a horse that is a confirmed case, a suspect response horse, or a close contact horse, or
 - one metre of a confirmed case companion animal, a suspect response companion animal or a close contact animal.
- require owners or persons in charge of animals to:
 - monitor the health of close contact animals daily
 - monitor the health of suspect response animals and infected animals at least twice a day
 - record health observations in the Hendra Virus – Animal observation checklist, and
 - advise an AO immediately of any emerging animal health/welfare issues

Note: An *emergency order that is property specific* may be served on the owner, occupier or person apparently in charge of the Hendra affected property where there are concerns about likely compliance with or challenge of a biosecurity direction.

11.2 Moving animals on Hendra virus restricted properties

An authorised officer may issue a permit to move:

- low risk animals (including close contact animals with a current Hendra virus vaccination status) without any testing
- Hendra virus positive or suspect response animals to uncontaminated areas on the property (consequently increasing the contaminated area) only where it is essential
- Hendra virus positive or suspect response animals to another premise only with prior permission from the NSW DPIRD CVO.

See Permits for further information

11.3 Removing restrictions

A biosecurity direction revoking all restrictions will be given when:

- 21 days have elapsed since the last confirmed positive case, AND
 - no suspect response animals remain on the premises, AND
 - all close contact animals have negative health monitoring for signs of Hendra virus infection
 OR
- there are no close contacts and 10 days have elapsed since the death of a positive case

12. Veterinary Investigations on Infected Premises, Dangerous Contact Premises or Trace Premises

12.1 Biosecurity directions for Hendra virus incidents

The owner/person in charge of the animal(s) should be given a copy of the [Response to Hendra virus infection in animals](#), [Hendra virus - Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE\)](#) and decontamination procedures for property owners and [Waiting for Hendra test results](#).

12.2 Collection of property information

Complete and accurate property information must be collected to make decisions about possible contact animals and likely contaminated areas.

12.2.1 Surveillance information

The following information must be recorded:

- name and contact details of person in charge of premises
- name and contact details of any other persons who reside in separate residences on the premises or reside elsewhere but own/manage animals on the premises
- traces as per 12.2.2
- animal identification details as per 12.2.3
- number and type of each animal species on the property including all pets
- feral and stray animal sightings
- map of premises

Any susceptible animals that may have contacted an infected animal, contaminated land or a contaminated fomite must be identified and the details of the known or likely contact or other relevant epidemiological information recorded. For example, 'Prince' nose to nose contact on xx.xx.xxxx, 'Brownny' shared paddock with infected horse, 'Fluffy' allowed to roam at night, 'Goldie' sniffed carcase. Use microchip or other unique identifier details where possible.

Other relevant epidemiological information should also be entered on the property file. Examples include potential contamination of feed/water by bat body fluids, which animals in mob are generally dominant, temperament of infected animal

12.2.2 Tracing information

Tracing to and from the property must be conducted to identify other places where Hendra virus infection/contamination may be present. This will include:

- the location(s) where an infected animal has been in the 16 days prior to the onset of clinical signs (to identify where the animal may have been infected)
-

- movements of susceptible animals to and from suspect premises for 16 days before the first observation of unusual morbidity or mortality in the susceptible species to identify any animal that may have been infected at or around the same time as the infected animal
- susceptible animals on neighbouring properties that are close contacts
- animals known or likely to stray onto the property that are close contacts, and
- potentially contaminated items (including vehicles, feed or fittings) that have left the property after known or potential contact with Hendra virus in the previous 10 days.

Tracing for the 10 days before Hendra virus illness or death was observed on the infected premises will primarily relate to items contaminated by moderately invasive procedures of the nasopharyngeal area of horses (such as stomach tubing or dental work).

12.2.3 Animal identification

All susceptible animals (except those classified as low interest animals) must be accurately identified. Identification records should include the:

- registered name
- stable or pet name
- current location of animal on property
- brands, eartag number, collar number and/or microchip number
- description including markings
- Hendra virus vaccination status (need vaccination certificate or database printout)

On properties with multiple animals of one species photographs should be taken of individual animals.

Where individual animals cannot be readily identified by operational staff, including incoming staff rostered or contracted for field duties, the animal should be fitted with suitable identification devices, such as numbered head collars.

12.2.4 Property map

A property map identifying the following should be developed to assist response decision making:

- boundary and internal fences
- known or suspected contaminated areas
- possible entry and exit points and a decontamination area
- gateways
- waterways/dams and water points
- stables and yards
- location of animals including where infected animals have been located in the 16 days prior to exhibiting clinical signs

- roads and laneways
- buildings/feed sheds/storage areas
- residences
- potential and known disposal areas
- immediate neighbours including type of enterprises if known
- potential hazards and other considerations which could impact operations
- approximate distances and building dimensions should be included

12.3 Premises classification

Premises holding known or potentially infected animals or items contaminated with Hendra virus should be allocated a status in LHMS according to the table below - Section 1 *Premises classification for sporadic Hendra virus incidents*.

In the event of multiple incidents or large numbers of traces the NSW DPIRD CVO may request that additional statuses as per Section 2 *Additional premises classification for multiple Hendra virus incidents* are applied to facilitate reporting.

Premises classification for sporadic Hendra virus incidents	
Infected Premises (IP)	A premises or part premises holding an animal which is an Infected Case, or where viable Hendra virus shed by an animal which is an Infected Case exists or is believed to exist on the property
Dangerous Contact Premises (DCP)	Premises that holds animals not showing clinical signs but that following a risk assessment is considered highly likely to contain a close contact animal or contaminated vehicles, equipment or things that may present an unacceptable risk to the Hendra virus response if not addressed. It includes neighbours to an IP where risk assessment confirms that it is highly likely that one or more animals are close contacts (known close contact between neighbouring horses and the infected horse on an IP)
Trace Premises (TP)	Temporary classification of premises that tracing indicates requires investigation as it may contain: • a susceptible animal(s) that has/have been exposed to a confirmed case, or a contaminated fomite(s), or • a contaminated animal product, or • a contaminated fomite

Resolved Premises (RP)	Premises that was previously classified as IP or DCP that has completed the required control measures
Additional premises classification for multiple Hendra virus incidents	
Assessed Negative Premises (ANP)	Premise that was previously classified as a SP where following testing of at risk animals it is concluded that the premises does not contain an infected animal at the time of designation
At Risk Premises (ARP)	Premises that contain a susceptible animal(s) but that is not considered at the time of designation to be an SP, DCP, IP or TP
Suspect Premises (SP)	Temporary classification of premises that contain a suspect animal
Unknown Premises (UP)	Premises with no information re animals or traces
Zero Premises (ZP)	Premises that does not contain susceptible species and is not known to have received potentially contaminated things

12.4 Epidemiological assessment

An expert epidemiological assessment of risks relating to Hendra virus infection may be undertaken on occasions to gain a better understanding of risk factors for spill over events. The LLS will coordinate these assessments and will:

- seek permission from the owner/manager of the premise for any site visits by experts
- source experts with experience in bat ecology and/or Hendra epidemiology, and distribute any reports from the experts

12.5 Surveillance on Infected Premises, Dangerous Contact Premises or trace properties

Suspect response animals should be sampled as soon as practical to confirm if they are infected.

Close contact animals must be monitored at least once daily for any signs of ill health for 21 days after being identified as a close contact.

Low risk animals, including close contact horses with a current Hendra virus vaccination status, do not require the intensive health monitoring given to close contacts but should be health checked periodically.

13. Implementing biosecurity controls

Effective biosecurity controls must be implemented immediately to prevent spread of the disease to susceptible species including humans.

13.1 Identification of high-risk areas

Any areas of the property that are high risk for a spillover of Hendra virus from flying foxes should be identified (e.g. fruiting trees or feed or water troughs under blossoming trees). Where practical, susceptible animals should be excluded from these areas to minimise the chance of another spillover event.

13.2 Assessment and segregation of susceptible animals in like status “risk groups”

Using the property map and tracing information all susceptible animals should be categorised as per Hendra virus case definitions as a:

- confirmed case
- suspect response animal
- close contact animal
- low interest animal

Animals should then be segregated in like risk groups to prevent disease spread to healthy animals. Segregation may be by a physical barrier like a solid wall or separation using a fence by a minimum of five metres from a close contact horse or one metre from a close contact companion animal.

Any close contact animal showing clinical signs consistent with Hendra virus infection is to be reclassified as a suspect response animal, segregated and tested.

Where insufficient paddocks are available to provide a five metre buffer around close contact horses temporary fencing can be used for segregation to create a minimum five metre buffer. It is important that susceptible animals on adjoining properties are also not able to come within five metres of higher risk groups. Moving them away from boundary areas is recommended.

13.3 Classification of land or other items that that require decontamination

The following land should be classified as contaminated (i.e. part of the contamination area):

- all land on which an infected animal has been located in the period from the onset of clinical signs
 - any land contaminated with bodily fluids/stable waste from an infected animal
 - any land contaminated with nasopharyngeal fluids/blood from an infected animal in the 10 days prior to the onset of clinical signs
-

- all the land within a one metre buffer around the land specified at a, b and c above that has held a companion animal, and
- all the land within a five metre buffer around the land specified at a, b and c above that has held a horse

Fixtures and equipment should be classified as possibly contaminated with Hendra virus if they are known or likely to have directly contacted:

- blood or nasopharyngeal secretions secreted or excreted from a Hendra virus positive animal in the 10 days prior to the onset of clinical signs, or
- body fluids (including nasopharyngeal secretions, urine, blood) or faeces from a Hendra virus positive animal, or a suspect response animal for up to 10 days after secretion or excretion. This may be by contacting the infected animal or carcass

13.4 Securing close contact animals

Fences should be checked and repaired where necessary to prevent horses from straying.

Close contact companion animals must be confined separately from humans and other animals until monitoring and testing is complete. Close contact dogs should be held in a secure yard or run or tied up and close contact cats confined to a cage or other secure area.

13.5 Access to contaminated areas

Contaminated areas within the premises should be defined as soon as practical to identify operational risks relating to their proximity to infected animals and/or animal products. A biosecurity direction defines these areas.

Contaminated land, equipment and things must be managed to:

- prevent the movement of Hendra virus to a new site (including within an existing premises), and
- minimise the risk to people and uninfected animals of exposure to Hendra virus
- ensure anything that has been contaminated with secretions from an infected animal is destroyed or decontaminated

A physical identifier such as hazard tape and signs “Caution - Do Not Enter” or “Danger” should be used to distinguish the line between the contaminated and clean areas.

Entry to the contaminated areas should be via designated entry/exit points specified on a map within a biosecurity direction.

Personnel and equipment entering the contaminated area(s) must be recorded in a log.

Susceptible animals and people should be moved off contaminated land. Further entry to contaminated areas should be avoided where possible.

Where a contaminated area/stable has to be used by other susceptible animals it must be decontaminated as per the [AUSVETPLAN Decontamination Manual](#). Use of contaminated areas must be as a last resort and must be authorised by the CVO.

NB: A susceptible animal introduced into a contaminated area will become a close contact animal. Where animals cannot be moved out of contaminated paddocks, areas of gross contamination should be fenced off or decontaminated.

All contaminated areas must be:

- clearly identified by hazard tape and/or warning signs
- clearly identified on the site map. The map should be used to identify other animals that may have been exposed to infection by potential contact with this land

13.6 Decontamination

Contaminated land, fixtures or equipment must be decontaminated by isolation for 10 days or if isolation is not possible, by disinfection in accordance with [AUSVETPLAN Decontamination Manual](#).

Everything leaving the contaminated area must be decontaminated /disinfected following [procedures](#). All persons leaving a contaminated area must decontaminate and remove contaminated clothing and PPE before entering clean areas

Equipment should be cleaned of dirt and organic matter using water and detergent prior to final decontamination. This initial clean down should be completed away from (though in close proximity to) the final decontamination site, then equipment moved to the decontamination site for final treatment. Final decontamination is to be completed with a disinfectant as per the [AUSVETPLAN Decontamination Manual](#).

13.7 Contact with animals on the declared premises

To limit risks to human health, contact with Hendra positive animals, suspect response animals and close contact animals should be restricted to essential tasks.

Essential tasks include:

- provision of food and water
- critical veterinary care
- daily health monitoring
- exercise required for animal health and welfare purposes
- emergency situations to address animal welfare obligations e.g. horse caught in fence
- Hendra virus operational tasks e.g. testing, euthanasia.

Owners must use PPE, trained in its use and advised to wear PPE if going within:

- five metres of a horse that is a Confirmed Case, a suspect response Horse, or a close contact Horse, or

- one metre of a Confirmed Case companion animal, a suspect response companion animal or a close contact Animal.

Advice and training are to be documented in the Biosecurity Direction.

14. Vaccination of close contact horses

Horses including close contact horses that do not have current Hendra virus vaccination status may be vaccinated against Hendra virus to reduce the chance of transmission of infection. Vaccination is at owner expense. The vaccine can only be administered by a veterinarian. Vaccinated horses are microchipped and details of vaccinated horses recorded on a publicly accessible database at <https://www.health4horses.com.au/?ReturnUrl=/index.aspx>

15. Monitoring of animals on infected premises, dangerous contact premises or trace premises

A biosecurity direction should include the requirement for owners or persons in charge of high-risk groups to undertake health monitoring as part of the ongoing care of the animal. In grazing animals, health monitoring may be possible from outside the contamination area and at a minimum five metre grooming, feeding, feet trimming. Temperatures should not be measured if PPE must be donned for this task alone.

Suspect response animals and infected animals should be monitored at least twice a day to identify potential emerging animal welfare issues.

Close contact animals must be observed for clinical signs of illness at least once a day and details noted in the Hendra Virus –Animal observation checklist.

Monitoring may cease when an animal is reclassified as negative for Hendra virus.

Low Risk animals should be monitored by the owner/manager in the same way as any other animal under their control.

16. Euthanasia

Animals showing clinical signs of Hendra virus infection frequently die or are euthanased before laboratory results are available. In situations on IPs or DCPs where positive or suspect response animals are alive, euthanasia may be appropriate to manage the risk of disease transmission, address animal welfare concerns or manage owner anxiety.

Euthanasia activities should only be performed by experienced and competent operators. Plans for the euthanasia must be developed in conjunction with plans for carcase disposal.

All activities surrounding the euthanasia of an animal must be treated with sensitivity.

All team members must be fully briefed prior to the conduct of any destruction actions.

Reference should be made to the:

- Australian Standards and Guidelines for the Welfare of Animals — Land Transport of Livestock, and
- AUSVETPLAN Destruction of Animals Manual

Factors to consider include:

- proximity to the neighbours and the general public
- the erection of a temporary structure to screen any activities that may be viewed by neighbours and the general public
- minimising potential media attention (this may include restricting air space)
- notification of immediate neighbours

16.1 Elective euthanasia

The Site Supervisor may facilitate the humane destruction and subsequent disposal of an animal with clinical signs consistent with Hendra virus. They must ensure that:

- the animal nominated for destruction is correctly identified
- the lawful owner/manager and the supervising veterinarian has signed a completed form Animal Euthanasia Consent Form.

16.1 Euthanasia under a Biosecurity Direction (destruction order)

There may be situations where confirmed Hendra virus cases pose a public health or disease transmission risk if alive and euthanasia is recommended by the NSW DPIRD CVO as the most appropriate action. In those situations, a written briefing justifying why euthanasia is appropriate must be prepared for NSW DPIRD CVO approval by the incident manager who must ensure that:

- a Biosecurity Direction in relation to the animals proposed euthanasia is given to the animal's owner at least 24 hours prior to the proposed euthanasia and that they are given an opportunity to lodge an objection before proceeding with any destruction operations AND
- the animal nominated for destruction in the biosecurity direction is clearly and correctly identified.

17. Post-Mortem of infected animals

On occasions valuable scientific information may be gained from post-mortem examination of positive or suspect response animals. An example would be infection in companion animals or in other species not previously confirmed to be naturally infected in field situations.

However a full post-mortem is a high risk procedure and should only be undertaken by experienced personnel with appropriate equipment and/or facilities to manage the risk. A risk assessment must be completed and NSW DPIRD CVO approval sought before undertaking a full post-mortem.

18. Disposal

Planning for disposal of carcasses needs to be carefully undertaken as each situation will present different challenges and options. The following resource provides more detailed information.

- [Primefact – Hendra Virus horse carcass disposal](#)
-

Definitions and acronyms

Animal Product	includes: • the hide, skin, hair, wool, feathers, shell, horn or hoof of an animal, or • any meat, fat, milk, whey, cream, butter, cheese, eggs or other food or foodstuffs derived from an animal, or • any part of the viscera of an animal, or • any dung, urine, faeces, bone or blood of an animal, or any article or substance derived from the dung, urine, faeces, bone or blood of an animal, or • any secretion of an animal, or • any product or biological preparation made or derived from any animal tissue or animal secretion, or • any article or substance derived from an animal, whether or not in combination with any other article or substance, or • any other article, substance or thing that is declared by the Minister, by order published in the Gazette, to be an animal product for the purposes of the Act.
APHL	The diagnostic laboratory facilities at the NSW Animal and Plant Health Laboratories (formerly known as the State Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory or SVDL), located and the Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute (EMAI)
Authorised officer (AO)	An officer of DPIRD that is authorised under the Biosecurity Act 2015
Biosecurity Duty Officer	The AO who is responsible for taking and managing calls on the Emergency Animal Disease hotline.
Close contact animal	A susceptible animal without a current HeV vaccination status known to have or assessed as having potentially:

- come within five metres of a **clinical** horse that is a confirmed case, or a suspect response horse (based on range of droplet spread); or
- come within one metre of a **clinical** companion animal that is a confirmed case, or a suspect response companion animal (based on range of droplet spread); or
- had direct contact with body fluids (including nasopharyngeal secretions, saliva, urine, blood,) or faeces within 10 days of secretion or excretion (based on maximum virus survival time) from an animal that is a symptomatic confirmed case, or a suspect response animal, or the carcase of recently deceased confirmed case; or
- had direct contact with blood or nasopharyngeal secretions from a **preclinical** confirmed case or a suspect response animal in the 10 days prior to the onset of clinical signs (based on infectious period); or
- had direct contact with blood or nasopharyngeal secretions during the potential infectious period (after exposed to virus and before confirmed to be infected) from an asymptomatic confirmed case or
- direct contact with a contaminated thing

Note: If an animal has had close contact with a suspect response animal that is later proven to not be a confirmed case, this animal may be reclassified as low interest.

Companion animal	Includes dogs, cats, rabbits, guinea pigs, ferrets whether kept as pets, or for therapy, work or commercial purposes.
Contaminated area	Is an area that has not been decontaminated and • holds/has held a horse that is a confirmed case e.g. stables/round yard/paddock where possible contamination from body fluids or faeces has occurred from the 10 days prior to the onset of clinical signs (based on infectious period (equine)), while clinical signs are present and in the 10 day period after death (based on maximum virus survival time); or • holds/has held a 'suspect response horse' or a 'close contact horse' plus a buffer zone of a minimum of 5 metres or • holds/has held a companion animal that is a confirmed case, a suspect response animal or close contact animal plus a buffer zone of a minimum of 1 metre or • is within a five metres radius of where a horse that is a confirmed case has been buried or burnt. or • on the basis of a risk assessment Hendra virus contamination is thought possible

Note 1: A contaminated area will be considered decontaminated 10 days after the last known potential secretion or excretion of the Hendra virus (based on maximum survival time).

Note 2: If the close contact or suspect response animals held in an area are tested negative then the areas they are housed in may be reclassified as no longer part of the contaminated area.

Contaminated Thing	Any vehicle, equipment or other item that has had direct contact (i.e. touched) with body fluids (including nasopharyngeal secretions, urine, blood) or faeces from a Confirmed Case or a suspect response animal (including carcasses) in the 10 days following secretion or excretion. This includes contact with blood or nasopharyngeal secretions from a confirmed case that were secreted in the 10 days before the onset of clinical signs.
CVO	Chief Veterinary Officer of NSW Chief Veterinary Officer of NSW
DCP	Dangerous Contact Premises
NSW DPIRD	New South Wales Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
ELISA	Enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay
Horse	All members of family equidae, including horses, ponies, mules, donkeys and zebras.
Infected case	An infected case is: • a terrestrial animal (with or without clinical signs) that tests positive to Hendra virus using one or more of the following tests: ○ polymerase chain reaction (PCR) ○ virus isolation ○ immunohistochemistry, or • an animal for which testing has not been possible or for which testing is inconclusive, but scientific evidence (clinical, laboratory, epidemiological) that the animal is/was infected is compelling (eg confirmed human infection following contact with an animal with clinical signs and history suggestive of Hendra virus infection).
Infectious period prior to clinical signs	A minimum 10 days. Note: On the basis of current field and experimental knowledge the likely risk period for possible transmission of infection in a horse prior to the onset of clinical signs is five days (i.e. genetic material has been identified

(via PCR) in nasal secretions from a horse five days prior to it demonstrating clinical signs) . Consistent with the precautionary approach historically adopted by the OIE, this figure has been doubled to a conservative figure of 10 days that a horse may be infective prior to exhibiting clinical signs. Including ‘minimum’ allows discretionary extension of the 10 day period where there is uncertainty about the exact date of onset of clinical signs, or where circumstances deem that additional precaution is appropriate.

IP	Infected Premises
Low interest animal	Can be: • a close contact animal with a current Hendra virus vaccination status, or • a susceptible animal on a quarantined property that is not a Hendra virus confirmed case, a suspect response animal or a close contact animal
LHMS	Livestock Health Management System
LLS:	Local Land Services
Positive case	Is a suspect animal that appropriate samples have been collected from and gives positive results to PCR testing or to an antibody profile specific to infection by VNT or ELISA testing.
Negative case	An animal that appropriate samples have been collected from and gives negative results to PCR testing or to an antibody profile specific to infection by VNT or ELISA testing and: • Is a close contact animal and was sampled at 20 days since the date of last contact with a Confirmed Case; or • Is a suspect response animal and has been sampled at 20 days since the date of onset of clinical signs; or • Is a Suspect animal and has been sampled Note: A horse that has died after showing symptoms indicative of Hendra virus infection is considered highly unlikely to have been infected with Hendra virus provided it gives negative PCR results on blood and/or tissues.
PCR	Polymerase Chain Reaction
PPE	Personal protective equipment
Range of droplet spread	Current field and experimental knowledge indicates that Hendra virus is transmitted by contact or droplet transmission (rather than aerosol). No definitive studies describing the range of respiratory droplet spread from horses could be found. The minimum distance of five metres is based on the

absence of transmission to horses beyond this distance in field scenarios, on qualitative extrapolation of droplet studies in humans and observations of exhaling horses after exercise. Including 'minimum' allows the discretionary extension of the five metre distance where circumstances deem that additional precaution is appropriate

Site supervisor	The person supervising the Hendra virus response related operations at a workplace or quarantined site.
SP	Suspected Premises
Susceptible animals	Include horses, dogs, cats, pigs, guinea pigs, rabbits, hamsters and ferrets and any other species which have been shown to be susceptible to infection with Hendra virus under laboratory or natural conditions.
Suspect animal	A susceptible animal which is showing signs that could be indicative of Hendra virus infection as listed under "suspicious clinical signs": or A healthy animal that is ELISA positive to an antibody profile specific to Hendra infection (VNT and PCR testing pending).
Suspect response animal	Any susceptible animal on an IP or DCP showing any sign of illness (including increased temperature, respiratory signs, gastrointestinal or neurological signs) consistent with the current knowledge of Hendra virus infection. Note that the current knowledge of clinical signs of Hendra virus in animals other than horses is principally extrapolated from knowledge of Hendra virus in horses.
Suspicious clinical signs	There are no pathognomonic clinical signs associated with Hendra virus infection. Horses infected with Hendra virus have shown variable and vague clinical signs. Most commonly an acute rapidly fatal illness with dominant respiratory or neurological signs is seen but a more prolonged illness has been reported on occasions. Pyrexia is a frequent early finding but may be absent later in the course of the illness. Sudden deaths with no observed illness have also been reported on a number of properties. Some of the signs observed include: • acute onset of illness and rapid deterioration • increased body temperature (pyrexia) • increased heart rate • discomfort/weight shifting between legs (both fore and hind limbs) • depression • neurological symptoms including any of 'wobbly gait' progressing to ataxia altered consciousness – apparent loss of vision in one or both

eyes, aimless walking in a dazed state, head tilting, circling, muscle twitching, urinary incontinence, recumbency with inability to rise

- respiratory symptoms including any of pulmonary oedema, respiratory distress, terminal nasal discharge (may be frothy/blood tinged), pulmonary congestion

other observations including:

- previous unexplained horse deaths
- facial oedema
- facial paralysis and/or a locked jaw
- spasms of the jaw, involuntary chomping
- altered gait, high stepping
- anorexia
- slow capillary refill
- colic-like symptoms including rolling (generally quiet abdominal sounds on auscultation of the abdomen in pre-terminal cases)
- straining with difficulty passing manure
- difficult urination
- hot hooves
- bad breath/halitosis
- delayed blood clotting times
- heavy sweating

Note: Some horses may have a mild illness from which they recover

TP	Trace Premises
VNT	Virus Neutralisation Test for antibody detection. Sometimes referred to as Serum Neutralisation Test or SNT.

Documentation:

Procedure – Prohibited Matter Pests and Diseases of Animals – Investigation and Alert Phase

Primefact - Hendra Virus

Primefact -Waiting for Hendra virus test results

Primefact -Response to Hendra Virus infection in animals

[Primefact -Hendra Virus horse carcass disposal](#)

[Primefact – Hendra Virus PPE and personal decontamination for property owners](#)

[AUSVETPLAN - Response Policy brief Hendra virus infection](#)

[AUSVETPLAN -Operational Procedure Manuals – Decontamination, Disposal, Destruction of animals](#)

[Biosecurity Qld Veterinary guidelines for handling potential Hendra virus in horses](#)

NSW Health factsheet [Hendra factsheet](#)

Records

All events must be recorded in LHMS.

Records created in relation to any property under a Biosecurity Direction in the case of an emergency must be stored for a minimum of ten years.

Revision history:

Version	Date issued	Notes	By
1	01 July 2017	New procedure developed from amalgamation and complete revision of old procedure in response to <i>Biosecurity Act 2015</i>	Animal Biosecurity and Welfare
1.1	03 June 2020	Edits to clarify notification to NSW health, changes to sampling requirements for close contacts, label change for Vaccine, clarification of role of AOs and private vets in sampling suspect horses and changes to some definitions and review hyperlinks and links to internal resources.	Animal Biosecurity
1.2	27 September 2024	Edits to clarify how close contacts are managed when not sampled, and how resolved after negative health monitoring.	Animal Biosecurity
1.3	August 2025	Edits to sampling, WHS sections, definitions, resources and reference documents and repairs to links reflecting new website architecture	Animal Biosecurity

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