

2 July 2011

Hendra virus update for the NSW horse industry

The Department of Primary Industries and the North Coast Livestock Health and Pest Authority are continuing to manage a confirmed case of Hendra virus near Wollongbar on the NSW North Coast. Staff are working closely with NSW Health and government authorities in Queensland.

This incident is not linked to the recent cases in Queensland.

There are no neighbouring properties with horses and the only other horse on the property is being monitored and appears well. The infected horse had not moved off the property in the last 32 days and had been in a paddock containing a fig tree where flying foxes had been roosting. It is highly likely that flying foxes were the source of infection.

Samples from the infected horse were positive at the State Virology Laboratory at Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute, Camden and were forwarded to the Australian Animal Health Laboratory (AAHL) at Geelong. They were again confirmed by AAHL to be positive to Hendra virus on 2 July 2011.

The affected horse was buried on the property. The property remains in quarantine and staff from the Department of Primary Industries and the North Coast Livestock Health and Pest Authority are working with property owners.

Restrictions are in place on the quarantined property and apply to the movement of horses and other items onto and off the property. Separate 'clean' and 'dirty' areas have been established on the property and the remaining horse has been isolated.

Horse owners are urged to review their biosecurity procedures and contact their veterinarian if they suspect Hendra virus. Horse event organisers are encouraged to review their biosecurity plans.

Human exposure

Nine people, including two veterinarians have been identified as having had contact with the infected horse. Public health unit staff have interviewed them to assess their level of exposure.

An expert panel of public health and infectious diseases physicians from Queensland and NSW was convened on 1 July 2011 to provide expert advice. The panel assessed all contacts as having negligible to medium level exposure to the infected horse.

These people are being closely monitored by public health unit staff.

Research

Dr Hume Field from the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries in Queensland visited the affected property on 2 July 2011. He collected information to assist scientific understanding of Hendra incidents and provided advice.

Horse movements in NSW

There is no lockdown for the NSW horse industry and, other than the quarantined property, the NSW horse industry is not subject to any movement restrictions for Hendra virus.

Notification of suspect Hendra

Report all suspected cases in horses to the local Livestock Health and Pest Authority, an inspector with the Department of Primary Industries, or the Emergency Animal Disease Hotline on 1800 675 888.

Reducing the risk to your horse

Horse owners can take the following steps to reduce the risk of horses becoming infected with Hendra virus. This advice is based on our current understanding of the virus:

- Place horse water containers under cover and feed horses under cover.
- Do not place horse feed and water containers under trees, particularly if flying foxes are attracted to those trees.
- If feed and water troughs must be placed in the shade of fruiting trees, consider building a cover over them to prevent contamination from above.
- Do not use feed that might be attractive to flying foxes if they are known to be in the area. Fruit and vegetables (e.g. apples, carrots) or anything sweet (e.g. molasses) may attract flying foxes.
- If possible, remove horses from paddocks when trees on which bats may feed are flowering. If this is not possible, fence or tape off the area under flowering trees. Alternatively, stable horses at high risk times when fruit bats are feeding or roosting in or around their paddocks.
- If it is not possible to remove horses from paddocks, try to temporarily remove your horses during times of peak flying fox activity (usually at dusk and during the night).

Further information

Further information on Hendra may be found at:

<http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/livestock/horses/health/general/hendra-virus>

Contact your GP, local Emergency Department or local Public Health Unit if you have concerns about possible exposure of people to a horse with Hendra virus infection. Contact details for NSW Public Health Units are available at: <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/publichealth/Infectious/phus.asp>

Information on the current situation in Queensland may be found at http://www.dpi.qld.gov.au/4790_2900.htm.

Ian Roth

Chief Veterinary Officer NSW

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Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (2 July 2011). 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