

3 July 2011

CVO Bulletin Hendra virus update for veterinarians

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 affected horse had not moved off the property in the last 32 days.

The infected horse had been in a paddock containing a fig tree where flying foxes had been roosting and 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 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.

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 exposure ranging from negligible to medium level to the infected horse.

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

Reminder on Hendra sampling protocols

Veterinarians are reminded that the following samples should be submitted from a horse suspected to be infected with Hendra:

- 10 mL of LiHep blood in evacuated tubes for PCR testing and
- 10 mL of clotted blood and
- Swabs from each nasal cavity pooled in PBGS or 2ml of saline if no transport media available.

Note oral or rectal swabs may also be collected.

Fresh submandibular lymph nodes or blood clots may be collected from dead horses.

PPE

Veterinarians are reminded of the importance of appropriate PPE when examining and treating horses. The most recent version of the Guidelines for Veterinarians handling potential Hendra virus infection in horses (Version 4.1) is available at the website www.biosecurity.qld.gov.au. This information was written for Queensland vets but the principles are applicable wherever there is a risk of Hendra virus infection.

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.

General Recommendations to veterinarians

Veterinarians are urged to review their Hendra virus case investigation procedures, infection control protocols and client communication resources.

Veterinarians should develop, train in and implement infection control procedures to manage the risks associated with working with sick horses.

Infection control procedures are the primary defense against horses in the pre-clinical phase where they may excrete Hendra virus but still appear clinically normal.

Where Hendra virus is a differential diagnosis, veterinarians should provide sound advice to horse owners to reduce their potential exposure, until a negative test result is returned.

Research

Dr Hume Field from the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries in Queensland visited the affected property on 2 July 2011 undertook an epidemiological assessment and provided advice.

Further information

Further information on Hendra including advice on sampling and information for clients may be found at:

- <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/livestock/horses/health/general/hendra-virus/vets>
- <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/biosecurity/animal/info-vets> and
- <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.

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Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (3 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.