
23 June 2014

Hendra Virus case near Murwillumbah

An unvaccinated 31 year old stock horse was found in a dam on a property west of Murwillumbah at about lunch time on Thursday 19 June 2014. It had a low temperature (28o Celcius), was glassy eyed, recumbent, had progressive lip paralysis and intermittent tremors that recurred when stimulated. There was no nasal discharge. The treating veterinarian administered warmed intravenous fluids and collected samples for Hendra virus testing.

The horse later became feverish and died in the early hours of Friday 20 June 2014. The laboratory advised late on 20 June 2014 that all the samples had tested positive to the Hendra virus. The property has been quarantined and the dead horse has been buried. There are 5 other horses on the property which so far remain well. They have been tested and vaccinated and remain under observation.

There are no dogs or cats on the property and no neighbouring horses. There have been no recent horse movements off the property. There is regular flying fox activity in the area.

Reminders for Horse Owners

This case is a timely reminder of 4 very important things:

1. We are entering the season when Hendra virus is more common i.e. the cooler months of the year. The more common symptoms of Hendra virus include fever, signs of colic, nervous and respiratory symptoms, abnormal behaviour or unexpected deaths. Owners with sick horses should contact their local veterinarian who will notify a Local Lands Service inspector or an inspector with DPI if they consider the case highly suspect for Hendra. If your veterinarian is unavailable, and the illness is progressing rapidly, call the Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline on **1800 675 888**.

2. Horse owners and managers should always practise good hygiene, even when handling healthy horses.

3. Owners should be aware of the risks associated with handling sick horses. The signs of Hendra virus are quite variable so **all sick horses should be handled cautiously and carefully**.

Children, domestic pets and other companion horses should not contact sick horses.

4. Horse owners should contact their veterinarian to discuss vaccinating their horses for Hendra virus to protect both the horses and their human handlers.

Hendra Vaccination

Hendra Virus vaccination 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 must be administered by a veterinarian. Two doses are required initially. With over 90,000 doses administered across Australia to date, current data indicates that the vaccine is safe and side effects minimal. Some veterinarians may refuse to attend unvaccinated sick horses.

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 (23 June 2014). 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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