

BIOSECURITY ALERT

Hendra virus—information for the community

9 September

Hendra virus – recent incidents in Queensland

Biosecurity Queensland are currently managing two incidents of Hendra virus infection on properties in Queensland, one at Cawarell and one near Bowen (the most recent).

Test results on a deceased horse came back positive for the virus on Tuesday 8 September and Biosecurity Officers have immediately implemented control procedures.

There are a number of horses on adjoining properties. Biosecurity Queensland officers are working with the owners to assess if there has been any exposure to the most-recently deceased horse.

The latest information on these incidents can be found on the Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries website at www.dpi.qld.gov.au

Hendra virus — general information

Hendra virus is a rare cause of disease in horses and humans and is not related to equine influenza.

The few cases of Hendra virus infection in humans have been the result of very close contact with horses infected with the virus.

Most cases involving horses are fatal but occasionally a horse will survive the infection.

Dealing with Hendra virus involves important public health and workplace health and safety issues, and requires careful management.

Biosecurity Queensland routinely tests horses to eliminate the possibility of Hendra virus infection. Only 13 incidents of Hendra virus occurring have been recorded since the virus was first discovered in 1994—12 of these have been in Queensland and one in New South Wales.

Hendra virus is a serious disease and Biosecurity Queensland, QPIF, must be notified of any cases of suspected Hendra virus via the Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline on 1800 675 888.

Hendra virus – the facts

- Hendra virus is a cause of sporadic disease in horses and humans, and is not related to equine influenza or rabies.
- While Hendra virus is present in flying fox populations, the risk of horses being infected is very low.
- In previous situations where Hendra virus has been confirmed, no cases of the infection have been found in animals other than horses.
- The few cases of Hendra virus infection in humans have been the result of very close contact with horses infected with the virus. Body fluids or secretions from an infected animal are likely to contain the virus.
- There is no evidence of human-to-human spread of Hendra virus.
- Since 1994, Hendra virus has been confirmed only 12 times involving about 40 horses and 7 humans.
- Hendra virus is normally carried by flying foxes; however, these animals should not be targeted for unnecessary culling. These animals are critical to our environment. They pollinate our native trees and spread seeds. Without them, we wouldn't have our eucalypt forests, rainforests and melaleucas.

Movement restrictions

Properties where Hendra virus has been confirmed will be placed under quarantine. Properties that have horses that have confirmed contact with the infected horses may also be subject to movement controls.

Movement controls restrict the movement of animals and other items onto and off properties. In these cases, the controls refer mainly to horses.

The movement of people is not restricted, however, good biosecurity practices should continue to be observed when people are entering and leaving the property.

What happens when quarantine and movement restrictions are removed from affected properties?

Properties involved in Hendra virus incidents will begin to be cleared of quarantine and movement restrictions at least 32 days after the time of last exposure and definitive test results have come back negative for Hendra virus.

This means properties can return to normal activities with no restrictions on horse movements to and from their property.

All community members can be assured that the animals and properties involved in confirmed cases of Hendra virus are safe once clearance to remove quarantine and movement conditions is given.

Properties with horses frequented by flying foxes should maintain good biosecurity practices. More information on good biosecurity practices can be found on the QPIF website www.dpi.qld.gov.au

Advice to horse owners

Managing Hendra virus does not involve movement restrictions for the general horse population. Movement is only restricted for properties under quarantine or other restrictions for Hendra virus.

Horse movements to events and other activities, including mixing of horses, can continue, however, sound biosecurity measures should be practiced. More information can be found on the QPIF website at www.dpi.qld.gov.au

People working with horses, such as farriers, equine dentists and chiropractors, strappers, vets, or feed delivery merchants should also follow sound biosecurity procedures.

Contact your local veterinarian if you notice changes in the health of your horses or suspect they may be infected with Hendra virus.

Where Hendra virus is suspected as the cause of illness or death in horses, Biosecurity Queensland should be contacted immediately.

Can humans contract Hendra virus?

The few recorded cases of Hendra virus infection in humans have been the result of very close contact with horses infected with the virus.

Biosecurity Queensland contacts Queensland Health whenever Hendra virus is confirmed or strongly suspected and there is a risk of human exposure to the virus. Queensland Health assesses whether any monitoring or medical assistance is required.

There is no evidence of bat to human, human-to-human or human-to-horse spread of Hendra virus.

More information

Notify suspected Hendra virus cases by contacting:
QPIF on 13 25 23 (during business hours)
the Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline on 1800 675 888 (24-hour hotline).

Contact the Queensland Health Hotline on 13 Health (432584) if you have concerns about possible exposure of people to Hendra virus.

More information is available at www.dpi.qld.gov.au where you can subscribe to the Hendra virus e-newsletter update.