



Hendra Virus (*Equine Morbillivirus*)

Fact sheet

What is Hendra virus?

Hendra virus was first discovered in 1994 in a racing stable in the suburb of Hendra, Brisbane. Hendra virus is a zoonotic disease, which means it can transfer from animals to people.

The exact way horses become infected by bats is still unclear but it is thought to be via horses coming into contact with the faeces or other waste of flying foxes or fruit bats.

Hendra virus can spread between horses if a horse inhales the respiratory secretions of an infected horse – although this is not a common route for transmission.

People are at risk if they have had close contact with a horse that has the Hendra virus. They can contract the virus through inhaling respiratory secretions or if they get bodily fluids from the horse on their eyes, nose, mouth or on their skin - especially if they have small cuts or abrasions.

Dealing with a Hendra virus infection is an important public health and workplace health and safety matter requiring careful management.

What do I look for in my horse?

Hendra virus can cause a range of symptoms in horses. Usually there is a sudden onset of fever and either respiratory or neurological illness followed by rapid death. Other symptoms can include:

- laboured breathing
- frothy and/or blood stained nasal discharge
- a temperature higher than 40°C
- neurological changes, including tilting of the head, loss of vision, abnormal muscle twitching, weakness and loss of balance
- colic-like discomfort



Reduce the risk

With respect to outdoors and in fields or stables, horse owners can take the following steps to reduce the risk of horses becoming infected with Hendra virus:

- Place horse water and feed containers under cover, and especially do not place horse feed and water containers under trees, as this may attract flying foxes
- Do not use feed that may attract flying foxes, for example fruit and vegetables (ie. apples and carrots) or anything sweet (molasses)
- 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.

Horses at Centennial Parklands Equestrian Centre (CPEC) are considered to be at low risk as they are stabled rather than roaming in paddocks. Also the strict entry protocols maintained at CPEC ensure no suspected horses will be able to enter the facility.

However, we can all take the simple steps to minimise the risk:

- Do not leave buckets of molasses or other feed uncovered that may attract flying foxes into CPEC
- Feed and water your horses under cover
- Remove any uneaten fruit/vegetables or sweet feed containing molasses from feed bins.

What do I do if I think my horse has Hendra virus?

If Hendra virus is suspected in your horse:

1. Return your horse to its stable immediately and close the stable door
2. Call your vet and notify the CPEC Manager immediately. If it is outside of office hours, the Parklands Security Ranger should be notified on 0412 718 611.
3. You are also required, by law, to notify an inspector working for the NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) of their suspicion at <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/aboutus/about/contact> or on the Emergency Animal Disease Hotline (ph: 1800 675 888). Only a vet with full bio-security protection should handle the horse until a negative diagnosis can be confirmed. If Hendra virus is confirmed, DPI will take the lead and all directives must be followed.

Contact by other horses with the suspected horse should be prohibited until a negative diagnosis can be confirmed. A tarpaulin should be placed over any mesh dividing wall between the suspected horse and another horse to prevent transmission to neighbouring horses through respiratory secretions.

Further information

For further information on the Hendra virus and diseases in NSW visit the DPI website at:

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