



# Equine Veterinary Surgery

## Limiting Your Risk of Exposure to Hendra Virus

### General Information

- Hendra virus is a **rare** disease of horses and humans. It is important to keep yourself informed but not alarmed about this disease. Horse owners have a workplace health and safety obligation to protect themselves and other people from the virus.
- Flying foxes are known to be carriers of the virus, but not all bats become infected. Bats don't show any clinical signs of infection but may shed the virus intermittently in their urine, saliva, and birthing fluids. It is believed that horses become infected by consuming contaminated feed, grass and/or water. Infection can occur throughout the year.
- Horses may shed Hendra virus for a couple of days before they develop clinical signs, so personal and stable hygiene are essential to reduce the risk of personal exposure and the spread of infection.
- Humans become infected by close contact with equine body fluids including nasal discharges, saliva, blood, and/or urine and faeces of an infected or dead horse.
- Death in affected horses usually occurs within two days.



**Roosting Flying Foxes**



**High Risk Paddock**

### Reducing the Risk of Exposure for Horses

- Never allow horses access to any area where flying foxes roost during the day.
- Do not graze horses in paddocks containing trees that attract flying foxes. These include fruiting fig trees, stone fruit trees, palm trees, and flowering Lilly Pillies, Eucalypts, Melaleuca, Callistemon, and Grevilleas.
- Do not place feed, hay and water containers under trees. If possible place the containers under suitable covers to reduce exposure to bats flying overhead.
- Do not feed horses with food that is attractive to flying foxes, such as fruit (apples)/vegetables (carrots)/molasses.
- Double fence your boundaries to reduce contact with other horses.
- Double fence a quarantine area on the property to isolate any sick horses.



**Double Fence Line**

## Clinical Signs of Infection in Horses

- Clinical signs of Hendra virus will vary from case to case as the virus can affect different parts of the body.
- The horse will usually have a high temperature, be off his food, and exhibit signs of pain and distress.
- If the lungs are affected the horse will develop rapid and laboured breathing, and there may be frothy fluid coming from the nose.
- If the gut is affected the horse may present with signs of colic such as restlessness, pawing and rolling.
- If the brain is infected the horse will show nervous signs such as lethargy, lack of coordination, circling, head pressing and convulsions.
- Deterioration can be rapid and death usually occurs within forty-eight hours.
- Hendra virus should be considered with the sudden death of an otherwise healthy horse.



**Flared Nostrils associated with laboured breathing.**

## Reducing the Risk of Exposure for Horse Owners

- Healthy horses can shed the virus for several days before developing clinical signs.
- It is important to get into the habit of washing your hands immediately after handling any horse or any tack that has been in close contact with a horse. Soapy water will destroy the virus. The bridle should be rinsed in a mild disinfectant after each use. Do not eat before washing your hands.
- Do not share tack or feed containers or handle one horse after another without disinfecting in between to prevent the spread of any infection.
- Sick horses should be isolated immediately. If protective clothing wasn't worn at first contact, you should take a shower, wash your hair and change your clothes.
- Notify your vet as soon as possible and warn him that your horse is not well. Follow all his instructions carefully. (Telephone: 07 4630 9983)
- When continuing to handle an unconfirmed case, disposable overalls, P2 masks, safety glasses, and gloves should be standard equipment.
- Avoid coming into contact with nasal discharges, saliva, urine faeces, and blood at all times.
- Dispose of any waste safely in sealed bags.



**Suspected Case of Hendra Virus in Isolation**

## Useful Contact Information

- Equine Veterinary Services: Telephone 07 4630 9983
- Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline: Telephone 1800 675 888 (24 hours)
- Biosecurity Queensland: 13 25 23 (8:00 am—6:00pm weekdays)
- Queensland health 24-hour hotline: Telephone 13 43 25 84 (24 hours)
- Workplace Health and Safety Queensland: 1300 369 915