

Hendra Virus – Reducing the Risk

The following steps can be taken to reduce the risk of your horses becoming infected with HeV. This advice is based on our current understanding of the virus. When more information is gathered through research, more specific advice will be available. In the meantime, the following steps are about reducing contact with items that may be contaminated by the body fluids of flying foxes

- Place feed, water and hay containers under cover.
- Bring horses in at night into covered enclosures or night holding paddocks with no trees in them.
- Do not use feed that might be attractive to flying foxes if they are known to be in the area. Fruit/vegetables (e.g. apples/carrots) or anything sweet (e.g. molasses) may attract flying foxes.
- Remove all nearby and overhanging trees from night time enclosures or holding paddocks.
- Remove horses from paddocks where flowering trees have resulted in a temporary surge in flying fox numbers. Return the horses after the trees have stopped flowering.
- Completely remove horses from, and never allow access at any time to areas where flying foxes roost.
- Do not plant trees in or near horse paddocks that attract bats. These include trees with soft fruits, figs, stone fruits such as peaches, loquats, and mangos. High risk native trees include Moreton Bay Figs, Palms, Lilly Pillies, Eucalypts, Melaleuca, Callistemon and Grevilleas.
- Seek veterinary advice before bringing any sick horse on to your property.
- If you have a horse that is suspected to have Hendra, do not move any other horses off the property until given the all clear.
- Keep any sick horse isolated from other horses, people and animals until you have obtained a veterinary opinion.
- Put double fencing on boundary fences and preferably on some or all internal fences – the width doesn't have to be huge and it will have the advantage of reducing fence related injuries, with horses playing or squabbling over fence lines.
- If you have a horse that is suspected to have Hendra, do not move any other horses off the property until given the all clear. Plan a quarantine area on your property for sick horses where they can be isolated.



This yard would once have been considered attractive, comfortable and ideal for horses. It is now considered extremely high risk for a Hendra Spillover event to occur.

Seek veterinary advice before bringing any sick horse on to your property. Keep any sick horse isolated from other horses, people and animals until you have obtained a veterinary opinion. If a horse dies, do not allow other horses access to those yards or stables until you have disinfected the area and removed contaminated material – wearing protective gear.

Do not allow visiting horse practitioners (farriers etc.) to work on sick horses; they should only work on healthy horses.

If there is more than one horse on your property, handle unaffected horses first, and only then handle sick horses after taking appropriate precautions.

Make sure gear exposed to any body fluid of horses is cleaned and disinfected before it is used on another horse. This includes things like halters, lead ropes, twitches. Talk to your vet about cleaning agents and disinfectants to use.

Wash your hands with soap and water regularly during and after handling multiple horses.

If in contact with sick horses, shower with soap and shampoo and dress in clean clothes and footwear before handling other horses. Disposable overalls, masks, simple safety glasses and disposable gloves should become a part of normal precautions when treating sick horses. All are cheap and readily available.

Personal safety

People have been exposed to HeV while handling infected horses. This has included sick live horses and dead horses at autopsy examinations. A major problem has been handlers not considering HeV at the time, and thus exposure occurring before the horse was diagnosed.

This means that people need to be more aware of possible cases and carefully consider safety whenever HeV is suspected. HeV can cause a life-threatening illness; you should therefore be cautious with suspected HeV cases and ensure the personal safety of yourself and others.

We need to encourage our vets to use proper biosecurity - remember that this is as much protection for your horses as protection for them - in reducing the risk of transfer of diseases as simple as the common cold between properties. If we do not support our vets in this cause we will lose them to the horse industry because of risk involved.

When treating sick horses, disposable overalls, P2 masks and gloves should become standard equipment on a property. These are all freely available and inexpensive. Safety glasses should also be used. These can be disinfected and reused. Wear rubber boots and use a foot bath when treating sick horses in a quarantine situation. In particular, treat blood and other body fluids (especially lung and nasal discharges, saliva, and urine) and tissues as potentially infectious and take precautions to prevent any direct contact with, or splashback of, these body fluids.

Protect all exposed skin, mucous membranes and eyes from direct contact and cover cuts and abrasions with a water-resistant dressing.



Thoroughly wash hands after and in between handling horses.

Personal protective equipment (PPE)

PPE is an important part of personal safety for HeV; however, some items of PPE (such as particulate respirators) require proper instruction and training in their wearing and use. Unless you have been trained in the proper use of PPE, your best defense is to isolate

your horse, wash off any contamination and wait for professional help to arrive. If your property is quarantined for HeV, Biosecurity Queensland officers will work with you to ensure a program is put in place and you wear adequate PPE when required.



Who to call

If you as a horse owner or carer suspect HeV, you should immediately contact your veterinarian. If you are unable to reach your veterinarian, you should notify a government biosecurity inspector (there is a legal obligation to do this). If it appears that human illness may be associated with the case, you should also include this information. Remember, notification is also an opportunity to seek professional advice.

Notify suspected HeV cases by contacting either:

- the DPI&F Business Information Centre on
- **13 25 23** (business hours)
- the Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline on **1800 675 888** (any time).

Clearly explain that you are calling to notify a suspect case of HeV. The person you speak to on the phone will be from Biosecurity Queensland. They will go through the case with you and help you have the case investigated (if needed).

Following this notification, and after due investigation, Biosecurity Queensland will decide whether the property in question should be quarantined to stop horses moving off the premises and possibly carrying infection with them.

Biosecurity Queensland will also notify the appropriate professional bodies, including the Australian Veterinary Association and Equine Veterinarians Australia.

Private details will not be released in these notifications.

If any person is concerned about their health at any time, they should seek medical advice.