



PLEASE NOTE THAT SINCE THE PUBLICATION OF THIS QLD HEALTH MESSAGE, A FURTHER CASE OF A HUMAN TESTING POSITIVE TO HENDRA VIRUS HAS OCCURRED AT ROCKHAMPTON

a Queensland Health *fact sheet*

Hendra Virus Infection

Description:

Hendra virus infection is a disease caused by the Hendra virus. The virus was first called equine morbillivirus when it was isolated in 1994 from specimens obtained during an outbreak of respiratory and nervous system disease in horses and humans in Hendra in Brisbane.

There have been only six confirmed human infections, all in Queensland, and three of these died. All six cases had been in close contact with sick or dead horses.

Symptoms:

- An influenza-like illness, which can progress to pneumonia; or
- encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) type symptoms i.e. headache, high fever, and drowsiness, which can progress to convulsions or coma.

Horses develop an acute respiratory or neurological syndrome quickly leading to death in most cases.

Transmission:

While Hendra virus does not appear to be very contagious, humans and horses are susceptible to the disease. All human infections have occurred following direct exposure to tissues and secretions from infected or dead horses. There is no evidence of human to human transmission.

The incubation period in humans has been estimated at 5-14 days.

The natural host for Hendra virus in Australia is the flying fox. It is not clear how horses become infected, but this may occur by them eating food contaminated by bat urine or birthing products.

Treatment:

A person suspected to be infected with Hendra virus may need to be admitted to hospital for supportive care such as intravenous therapy and mechanical ventilation. It is not known whether antiviral treatments are effective against Hendra virus infection.

Prevention:

There is no vaccine against Hendra virus. The most important means of preventing Hendra virus infection is to avoid animals that are known to be infected. When contact with potentially infected animals is necessary, take precautions that include using appropriate personal protective equipment and following recommended hygiene and environmental cleaning measures.

Horse feed and water troughs should not be placed under trees where bats may feed or roost. Any suspected cases in horses or humans should be reported, investigated and treated as soon as possible.

Help and Assistance

For further information please contact your local doctor, community health centre or nearest Population Health Unit.

Hendra Virus Infection

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www.pcaq.asn.au

HORSE AND DONKEY BIOSECURITY

The 2007 equine influenza (EI) outbreak in Australia saw many people become aware of the importance of biosecurity to prevent disease outbreaks and their spread.

Biosecurity is relevant to everyone who owns a horse or who works on a property or in a facility where horses are kept.

As seen with the EI outbreak, diseases can be highly contagious and are capable of spreading large distances in a short period of time. In Australia, there are regular movements of large numbers of horses from state to state to participate in different horse sports and for breeding.

However, during the 2007 EI outbreak, when there were strict controls preventing horse movements, it became obvious that people were largely responsible for the disease spreading to uninfected areas.



Biosecurity

The simple biosecurity measures below are relevant to people who work with horses or have a role in maintaining horse properties.

On your property

- Only allow visitors contact with your horses if necessary. Keep them out of stable areas and paddocks if they don't need to be there.
- For new horses arriving on your property, know where they've been prior to their arrival and make sure they're healthy. A minimum 7-day period of quarantine (isolation) is advised before introducing them to other horses on your property.

Keep Records

Keeping a simple log of visitors to your property is also a good practice - especially if they have had contact with other animals prior to entering your property. Other details that are important to record are vehicle registration and a mobile phone number.

Free **visitor register sheets** can be downloaded from www.farmbiosecurity.com.au

Horse gear

- Don't share your horse gear with other people and their horses.
- If your gear has been used by other horses/people, make sure it's thoroughly cleaned and disinfected before coming back into contact with your horse. This includes tack, bits, rugs, saddlecloths, feed and water bins. Ensure vets, farriers and others providing services use clean equipment on your horses.

You and your gear

As experienced with equine influenza, some diseases can be easily carried on people's clothing, hats, hair and footwear.

Before having contact with horses outside your property, change into clean clothes and footwear; wash your hands with soap and water; and blow your nose. Sometimes it may be necessary to have a shower and wash your hair.

Floats and trucks

Where different horses are using the one vehicle, it is suggested the interior of the float or truck be washed out and disinfected before loading new horses.

Cleaning and Disinfectants

For a surface to be sufficiently disinfected, it must first be thoroughly cleaned. Remove all soil, organic material, sweat, hair, mucus and saliva.

Disinfection can then be achieved with the use of household products such as common detergents and soaps (eg washing powder), washing soda, household chlorine bleach, hypochlorites, swimming pool disinfectant and citric acid. Check concentration and exposure times on the label.

Events

Event organisers should check what biosecurity measures are required by the relevant Department of Primary Industries (DPI) or Agriculture. You may also need to register your event with them.

The biosecurity measures outlined above are also applicable at events - don't share your gear, feed and water bins. While it is impossible to keep horses separate at events, make sure your horse is in full health before leaving your property.

Any horses showing signs of illness should be isolated and veterinary attention sought.

Check your horse regularly and know what to look for

The following table provides the 'normal' vital signs for an adult horse at rest, and how you can check them.

	Normal in adult horse at rest	How to measure
Temperature	37-38°C	Insert a thermometer into the horse's rectum. Read the temperature after one minute. Digital thermometers are easier to use and will 'bip' once the temperature has been read.
Pulse/Heart Rate	Approx. 38 beats per minute	The easiest way to take your horse's heart rate is with a stethoscope. Stand at the horse's left-hand shoulder and place the stethoscope on the chest (just inside the front leg/in line with the elbow). You may need to move it around a bit to find the heart. Alternatively, the pulse can be found under the jaw or on the underside of the horse's dock.
Respiration	8-15 breaths per minute	Observe the rib cage's inwards and outwards movements. Alternatively, place your hand in front of the nostril to feel the exhalation.
Dehydration		The pinch test - pinch the skin on the horse's neck. The skin should flatten within one second of releasing it. The longer it takes for it to flatten is a measure of the dehydration level.
Capillary Refill Time	1-2 seconds	Lift the horse's upper lip. Press your thumb firmly against the gums for two seconds. This will leave a white mark. Normal pink colour should return within 1-2 seconds.
Mucous Membranes	Linings of the eyelids, gums and inside the nostrils. The normal colour is a moist pink.	Abnormal: Very pale pink, bright red, grey, bluish or yellow.

Reporting

The key to success in eradicating any new disease is early recognition. The sooner a disease is reported, the earlier authorities can contain it, undertake tracing and put a control program in place - providing a better chance of disease eradication.

Reporting is easy. Simply call your local vet or phone the national **Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline** on **1800 675 888**. This will put you in contact with your state or territory department of primary industries or agriculture, where an officer will follow up on your report.

Most horse diseases do not require horses to be destroyed for disease control purposes. Usually a worst case scenario will involve quarantine, a recovery period and where necessary, vaccination.

There is a [list of diseases that are 'notifiable'](#). This means that if you suspect an animal is showing symptoms of one of these 'notifiable' diseases, you are obliged by law to report it.

Stay Informed and Inform Others

- Your state or territory DPI website will have the latest on pest and disease outbreaks in your area. The website for major outbreaks of national concern is www.outbreak.gov.au
- You can subscribe to the Australian Horse Industry Council's [Emergency Horse Contact Database](#). This free service provides horse owners with relevant, localised information during an emergency, including disease outbreaks, fires and floods.
- Not everyone has access to the internet. If you feel that the information on this page is relevant to someone you know, print off a copy and give it to them.

[Horse and donkey biosecurity](#)  PDF [132kb]

[Horse biosecurity for kids and pony clubs](#)  PDF [162kb]

- [Subscribe to DAFF's On-farm Biosecurity news and updates.](#)

Biosecurity Video Clips

See our [videos showing the simple biosecurity measures](#) you can implement around horses and donkeys.

Additional Resources

Other websites relevant to horse owners:

- [HorsesLandWater](#) - improving the health of horses and the environment
- www.farmbiosecurity.com.au

If you have an enquiry about our biosecurity information please contact us [by email](#) (BEMU@DAFF.GOV.AU) or phone 02 6272 5859.

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