

## Workplace Health and Safety Queensland

**SAFETY ALERT****Hendra virus – information for horse properties and other horse-related businesses****Purpose**

The purpose of this alert is to inform horse properties and other horse-related businesses of the risks surrounding Hendra virus and preventative measures to minimise the risk of human infection.

**Background**

Hendra virus is a rare disease of horses and humans that can cause a serious and life threatening illness. The natural hosts of Hendra virus are bats (flying foxes) which can then pass the virus onto horses. Human infection results from close contact with the blood, body fluids and tissues of infected horses. There is no evidence of human to human spread of Hendra virus.

Hendra virus infection of horses can include rapid onset of illness, increased body temperature, increased heart rate, discomfort or weight shifting between legs, depression, respiratory and neurological signs. Not all of these signs will be found in any one infected horse.

**Risk**

Hendra virus incidents are rare. However, the potential seriousness of the disease for both humans and horses requires that workplace health and safety measures, to prevent infection, should be implemented at workplaces where there is occupational contact with horses.

Sound hygiene and biosecurity (animal disease control) measures should be adopted as a routine work practice for all horse contact.

**Prevention**

Hendra virus requires careful risk management. You should develop a plan for responding to a suspect or confirmed case of Hendra virus at your workplace, including how you will minimise the risk to yourself, your workers and others such as visiting horse practitioners (farriers, etc.) You should then train your workers in the implementation of the plan.

You should also consider the following measures:

- Take steps to protect horses from becoming infected with Hendra virus by:
  - placing feed bins and water troughs under cover
  - avoiding planting trees that attract flying foxes in or near horse paddocks
  - removing horses from paddocks if flying foxes are feeding on trees or roosting in that paddock.
- Ensure safe systems of work as a routine work practice for all contact with horses, their blood and body fluids and associated equipment. This includes:
  - regular hand hygiene
  - maintaining standards of cleanliness and stable hygiene
  - cleaning and disinfecting equipment that has been in contact with horses' body fluids.
- If you have a sick horse, isolate the horse from other horses, people and animals (e.g. remove companion animals to another area) until you have obtained a veterinary opinion.

- Avoid close contact with a sick horse where possible. If this is unavoidable, consider the horse's blood and body fluids as potentially infectious and take precautions to prevent contact with these including:
  - using personal protective equipment (PPE) to protect your clothing, exposed skin and face from contact with the horse's blood and body fluids
  - training workers and yourselves in how to use unfamiliar PPE, such as particulate respirators
  - covering cuts and abrasions with a water-resistant dressing
  - following instructions for biosecurity and personal safety provided by a Biosecurity Queensland officer or veterinarian.
- If you have handled a sick horse, and before contact with other horses:
  - wash off any contamination with plenty of soap and water
  - shower and wash your hair
  - change your clothes.
- Arrange your activities so that you have contact with the sick horse last.
- Always consider Hendra virus as a possible cause of illness in horses. Notify suspected Hendra virus cases by contacting Biosecurity Queensland on **13 25 23** or the Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline on **1800 675 888**. There is a legal obligation to notify.
- Seek medical advice or ring Queensland Health **13 HEALTH** (1300 43 25 84) if you or a worker has had contact with a horse suspected or confirmed as being infected with Hendra virus.

## Further information

For more information on workplace health and safety relating to occupational diseases, visit [www.worksafe.qld.gov.au](http://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au) or call the Workplace Health and Safety Infoline on 1300 369 915.

Download the alert on: [Hendra virus - Information for veterinarians](#).

[Complete the self-survey for managing occupation Hendra virus risks for horse properties and other horse-related businesses](#) (PDF, 55 kB)

More information on Hendra virus in horses and biosecurity is available from Biosecurity Queensland [www.biosecurity.qld.gov.au](http://www.biosecurity.qld.gov.au), call 13 25 23, or your veterinarian.

Visit the Biosecurity Queensland website to download more information for:

- veterinarians
- horse owners
- horse industries
- communities.

For more information on Hendra virus in humans, contact Queensland Health [www.health.qld.gov.au](http://www.health.qld.gov.au) or 13HEALTH (13 43 25 84).

Information is also available from the Queensland Horse Council <http://www.qldhorsecouncil.com>

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