

Horse Industry Update



Government of South Australia
Biosecurity SA

Hendra virus – update for horse owners

Biosecurity SA is continuing to monitor the current outbreak of Hendra virus in Queensland and northern New South Wales. New cases of Hendra virus in horses have been confirmed in Lismore, NSW and in Boondall and Hervey Bay, Queensland over the weekend. Horse owners can find more information regarding these cases on the respective state government websites:

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

http://www.dpi.qld.gov.au/4790_2900.htm

Most of you would be aware that Hendra virus is carried by flying foxes (fruit bats) and is thought to be transmitted to horses through urine and birthing fluids. People have also contracted the virus from infected horses.

This year, the number of cases detected and the duration of the outbreak is greater than has been previously experienced in Australia. The cause of this is not known at this time but seasonal influences may have altered the behaviour of the flying foxes.

While there has never been a case of Hendra virus in horses detected in South Australia horse owners need to be aware that this is a possibility. There are at least two small colonies of Grey Headed Flying Foxes in South Australia (Adelaide and the Southeast) and these animals could carry Hendra virus.

Biosecurity SA does not plan to test these animals because:

- a) Testing procedures may stress the animals and increase the likelihood that they will excrete the virus if it's present
- b) A negative test result does not guarantee the colony is free of the virus
- c) A positive test result would not impact on the management of the colony.

Even if the fruit bats carry the virus, we believe local factors mean the risk to South Australian horses is much lower than it is in Queensland and northern NSW. Nonetheless, horse owners should take steps to minimise the potential for contact between the flying foxes and their horses. These steps include:

- Place feed and water containers under cover if possible but not under trees, particularly if flying foxes are attracted to those trees.
- Do not use feed that might be attractive to flying foxes if they are known to be in the area. For example fruit and vegetables or anything sweet, such as molasses.
- If possible, 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. If removal of horses from these paddocks is not possible, try to temporarily remove your horses during times of peak flying fox activity (usually at dusk and during the night).
- Wash your hands with soap and water regularly during and after handling multiple horses.
- Keep any sick horses isolated from other horses, people and animals until you have obtained a veterinary opinion.

- 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 then only handle sick horses after taking appropriate precautions.
- Make sure gear exposed to any body fluids from horses is cleaned and disinfected before it is used on other horses. This includes things like halters, lead ropes and twitches. Talk to your vet about cleaning agents and disinfectants to use.
- Seek veterinary advice before bringing any sick horse back to your property.

Further details can be found in the fact sheet on the Biosecurity SA website:

http://www.pir.sa.gov.au/pirsa/more/factsheets/fact_sheets/animals_and_livestock/horse/flying-foxes_and_hendra_virus_150_advice_for_horse_owners

It is also possible that a horse infected with Hendra virus could be transported into South Australia from interstate. All new horse should be isolated from other horses on arrival for three weeks and monitored for signs of illness.

Biosecurity SA is working with private veterinary practitioners to test sick horses and exclude Hendra virus as a cause of the illness. All horses tested to date have returned negative results.

The signs of Hendra virus infection are not specific and any unwell horse should be seen immediately by a veterinarian to determine if Hendra virus could be causing the illness. Testing to exclude Hendra virus can be organised if necessary and Biosecurity SA can assist with the cost of this exclusion testing.

If horse owners suspect that their horse may have Hendra virus or has a sudden onset of severe neurological, respiratory or colic signs then they need to:

- Phone a private veterinary practitioner to examine the horse
- Notify Biosecurity SA on the Emergency Animal Disease Hotline 1800 675 888
- Isolate the sick horse and minimise human contact.

We also remind horse owners of the need to have a Property Identification Code (PIC) for their properties. One PIC covers all animals and species on a property.

Having all horse owners registered with a PIC enables Biosecurity SA to identify where and in what numbers horses are kept, which is vital information that is needed to respond effectively to animal health threats such as Hendra, and inform horse owners of action that is needed to be taken.

If you have any concerns or questions about Hendra virus please do not hesitate to contact Biosecurity SA on (08) 8207 7900.