

8 July 2013

CVO and Health Protection NSW bulletin to NSW veterinarians re: new Hendra virus cases

Hendra Virus cases on mid north coast NSW

Following on from the previously reported case of Hendra virus infection in a horse west of Macksville on 5 June 2013, two more unrelated horse infections on 4 and 7 July 2013 have been confirmed on separate properties, west of Macksville and Kempsey. The properties are approximately 30 kilometer apart and the first two have fruiting White Cedar trees along the creek line. Although a low incidence of bats have been reported on these properties some bat faeces and spats were located in the vicinity of the white cedar trees.

The properties have been quarantined and initial investigations indicate there have been no recent movements of horses from these properties. All in contact animals will undergo ongoing monitoring.

Infected Property 2 (IP2)

On Thursday 4 July a 6 year old gelding stock horse was examined and showed signs consistent with severe colic with a temperature of 38.4, heart rate of 65 and respiratory rate of 60. The horse had no detectable gut sounds, was ataxic, weak, stumbling and rolling. It did not respond to intravenous Xylazine or Finadyne treatment and was euthanased. It had been noticed to be separated from the two companion horses the day before the onset of clinical signs. The two companion horses have been sampled, microchipped and vaccinated for Hendra virus. Three in contact dogs have also been tested for Hendra virus. All initial test results from the in contact animals were negative.

Infected Property 3 (IP3)

On Sunday 7 July a third case of Hendra was diagnosed in an 18 year old mare. She was noticed to be reluctant to move a few days prior to veterinary examination and presented with ataxia, heart rate of 60 and T 38.6. Although gut sounds were present, she went down whilst being examined. Similar treatment to that used on IP2 was also unsuccessful on this horse. A companion horse has been tested and vaccinated and will be monitored.

Advice for Veterinarians

Appropriate PPE which prevents contamination of the skin, eyes, nose and mouth should always be used when handling sick horses. Any skin cuts or abrasions can be a route of entry for viruses and should be covered to prevent contamination by any horse body fluids. It is recommended veterinarians consider the possibility of Hendra virus and Lyssavirus when treating suspected colic cases. Both these viral diseases can present with neurological signs, stance and gait changes, pyrexia and general malaise in the early stages very similar to colic cases. It is important to ensure sound hygiene and biosecurity measures are adopted when handling sick and "in contact" horses, including their oronasal discharges, blood and other body fluids. PPE is also required when handling any specimens from horses suspected to have Hendra. Hands should be washed thoroughly with soap and water or an alcohol hand rub as soon as practicable after contact with sick horses or related specimens.

All vets visiting horse properties should have a PPE kit in their car containing:

- disposable gloves,
- P2 masks,
- disposable overalls,
- cleanable eye shield, and
- alcohol-based hand gel or hand rub.

Kits should be checked periodically to ensure the contents is within its effective date.

Veterinary Advice for Horse Owners

1. Horse owners should be encouraged to vaccinate horses for Hendra virus.
2. Horse paddocks containing fruiting or flowering trees (or other trees that attract bats) should be fenced off so horses do not camp under them.
3. Horse feed and water containers should be located under cover and away from bat faecal and spat contamination.
4. Isolate sick horses from humans and other animals and wear PPE if required to handle a sick horse.

Further information

The DPI website "[Hendra virus- Information for vets](#)" contains information on

- Biosecurity guidelines and other Veterinary advice
- Sampling, packaging, submission and transport of specimens
- Human health issues (or phone NSW Health on 1300 066 055)
- Work Health and Safety Responsibilities (or phone Workcover Authority of NSW 131050).

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

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Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (8 July 2013). However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that information upon which they rely is up to date and to check currency of the information with the appropriate officer of NSW Department Primary Industries or the user's independent adviser.

