26 December 2016

**Hendra virus infection in horse near Casino**

Hendra virus infection has been confirmed in an *unvaccinated* horse that died around 15 December 2016 after being ill for several weeks.

The 22 year old stock horse gelding was sampled by a private veterinarian on 27 November 2016 with the owner reporting vague signs of illness for a few weeks prior to this date. All six samples tested negative to Hendra virus by PCR. The Australian Animal Health Laboratory advised NSW DPI on 22 December 2016 that testing of the serum samples had detected antibodies to Hendra virus consistent with natural infection (supporting a convincing history that this animal was not vaccinated).

It is believed that virus was not detected initially because this animal was sampled a few weeks after becoming unwell and had already mounted a strong immune response.

Initial clinical signs observed included: failure to graze, nasal discharge, some ataxia, mild disorientation, weight loss and oral discomfort. Further behavioural abnormalities were seen prior to death.

Additional samples were collected from the carcase several days post death with one weak PCR positive result to Hendra virus and two negative results. It is likely that the horse was not infectious or shedding little virus from approximately late November however the property has been quarantined to prevent any possibility of spread of infection to people or animals from this case.

**Veterinarians are reminded that they should not assume that horses are not infectious based only on Hendra virus PCR testing. The full suite of test results is required to confirm disease status.**

**Hendra Vaccination**

Hendra Virus vaccination is considered the most effective way of reducing the risk of Hendra virus infection in both horses and humans. Human infection and deaths have occurred following high-level exposure to body fluids from infected horses. Vaccinating horses is an important measure to prevent this occurring and provides a public health and workplace health and safety benefit.

**Advice for Horse Owners**

1. Horse owners should talk to their vet about vaccinating their horses for Hendra virus to protect both the horses and their human handlers.

2. The symptoms of Hendra virus infection are not specific. Horses may be listless, feverish, have signs of colic, nervous and respiratory symptoms, abnormal behaviour or die suddenly. In some cases illness may be more prolonged.

3. Owners with sick horses should contact their local veterinarian who will notify a Local Lands Service inspector or an inspector with DPI if they consider the case highly suspect for Hendra. If your veterinarian is unavailable, and the illness is progressing rapidly, call the Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline on 1800 675 888.

4. Owners should be aware of the risks associated with handling sick horses. **All sick horses should be handled cautiously and carefully, especially when any testing is pending or there is an open diagnosis.** See the DPI Factsheet Waiting for Hendra virus test results at [http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/animals-and-livestock/horses/health-and-disease/hendra-virus/response-docs/test-results](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/animals-and-livestock/horses/health-and-disease/hendra-virus/response-docs/test-results)

5. Children, domestic pets and other companion horses should not contact sick horses.
Management of suspect Hendra cases

- Always use PPE when handling sick horses
- DO NOT allow sick horses to be handled by children or other people.
- Isolate sick horses from pets or other horses.
- NOT allow dogs or other animals to contact sick or dead horses. Keep them away from the sick horse and its body fluids.
- DO NOT move sick horses to another area as this may spreads the infection.

Further information

The DPI website “Hendra virus- Information for vets” contains information on

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


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Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (23 December 2016). 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.