

# Waiting for Hendra Results

July 2017, Primefact 1310, third edition  
Animal Biosecurity and Welfare, NSW DPI

## Introduction

If your veterinarian considers your horse may have Hendra virus, they will take samples for testing at a government laboratory. Initial test results are usually available in 1–2 working days but may take longer around weekends and public holidays.

The full suite of tests may take one or more weeks to finalise. The horse cannot be confirmed as not infected until all these tests have been completed. To assess the risk that a sick horse may be infectious your veterinarian will need to consider:

- the horse's history of potential exposure to infection (e.g. contact with bats)
- the signs of illness, and
- all test results.

## Caring for horses while waiting for Hendra results

Although Hendra virus infection in people is rare all of human cases have caught the infection from horses. So strict precautions must be taken when you are caring for your horses while waiting for Hendra results.

While you are waiting for test results:

- If possible, avoid going within five metres of the sick horse until Hendra virus has been ruled out
- **Do not** allow children or minors to be within five metres of the sick or dead horse or its body fluids or wastes
- If it is necessary to go within five metres of the sick or dead horse, keep the number of people having contact to a minimum and take the precautions outlined under *How to reduce the risk of people becoming infected* and *Personal Protective Equipment* in this primefact
- Move sick horses away from areas that can be accessed by the public
- Isolate the sick horse from other animals if it is safe to do so. Ideally, leave the sick horse where it is and move other animals to a different area of the property
- If you need to feed and water the sick horse keep your distance from them
- Don't get routine work such as dentistry or farrier done while Hendra test results are pending
- Notify your veterinarian immediately of any change in the health status of any animal on the property.

## Managing a carcass

If the horse under investigation dies or is euthanased, avoid contact with the carcass where possible.

The owner or person in charge of the horse is responsible for the disposal of the carcass.

Have a plan for the method of disposal of the carcass, e.g. deep burial on the property, burning on the property or transport to a disposal site.

Machine operators should avoid contact with suspect carcasses by using the bucket to manipulate the carcass. Wash down and disinfection then becomes very easy as Hendra virus is very susceptible to common disinfectants. If full cleaning of machinery is not possible prior to disinfection the machinery may need to be isolated, possibly for up to 10 days.

Restrict access to the carcass until it can be disposed of e.g. cover with tarpaulin and tape off area.

Advise anyone disposing of the carcass that the horse is under investigation for Hendra virus and to take the precautions outlined under the headings *How to reduce the risk of people becoming infected* and *Personal Protective Equipment* in this primefact.

## Caring for other animals while waiting for Hendra results

Some other species of animals, such as dogs, cats and pigs are known to be susceptible to Hendra virus infection. If they become infected with Hendra virus they may pose a risk to humans.

All pets should be locked up to prevent contact with the sick horse, its carcass or its body fluids and wastes.

Always practise strict hygiene when handling any animal, especially those that may have had contact with the infected animal or its body fluids and wastes.

Until the test results are back limit close contact with pets that may have been in contact with the suspect horse or its environment unless personal protective equipment (PPE) is worn.

## How to reduce the risk of people becoming infected

Do not approach within five metres of a horse that may be infected with Hendra virus unless it is necessary.

If you must closely approach a sick or dead horse and Hendra virus has not been ruled out, always take the following precautions:

- Cover cuts and abrasions with a water-resistant dressing
- Put on all personal protective equipment (PPE) as outlined below
- After handling the horse, remove and decontaminate or dispose of the PPE carefully, making sure there is no contact with your face, particularly your eyes, mouth and nose
- Carefully remove any clothing contaminated with a sick horse's body fluids
- Immediately wash your hands with soap and water and dry them or use hand wipes and waterless hand hygiene solution
- If you have handled a sick horse, follow these steps before having contact with other horses:
  - Wash off any contamination with plenty of soap and water
  - Shower and wash your hair
  - Change your clothes and footwear
  - Disinfect footwear and wash clothes in soapy water.
- Arrange your activities so that you handle unaffected horses first and have contact with the sick horse last.

## Personal protective equipment

Personal protective equipment must be fitted and worn correctly. The following personal protective equipment is required if you need to be within five metres of a horse that may be infected with Hendra virus:

- P2 respiratory protection (mask). People who have beards require specialised respiratory protection provided by powered rebreathing units.
- Rubber boots
- Protective clothing e.g. disposable overalls with full head protection
- Eye protection (non-vented goggles or included in respiratory protection)
- Rubber gloves/double gloved.

See the publication [Guide - Use of personal protective equipment](#) for further information about PPE.

## Human health concerns

If you have concerns about a person's health at any time, seek medical advice. Contact your general practitioner, local hospital emergency department or local [public health unit](#) if you have concerns about possible exposure of people to a horse infected with Hendra virus. In NSW calling **1300 066 055** will direct you to your local Public Health Unit.

## More information

- Local Land Services, Tel: 1300 795 299
- To view details of your LLS region: <http://www.lls.nsw.gov.au/>
- Tel: 1800 680 244, Animal Biosecurity and Welfare
- Department of Primary Industries at [biosecurity@dpi.nsw.gov.au](mailto:biosecurity@dpi.nsw.gov.au),

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Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (August 2017). 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

the Department of Primary Industries or the user's independent adviser.

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