

CHIEF VETERINARY OFFICER BULLETIN – 23 May 2022

For Industry - Probable cases of Japanese Encephalitis in NSW horses

NSW Department of Primary Industries has detected evidence of infection with Japanese encephalitis (JE) virus in horses from several Local Land Services regions across NSW (North Coast, Hunter, Greater Sydney, Central West, Riverina, and South East regions).

Horses contract JE and other diseases like Murray Valley encephalitis, West Nile/Kunjin virus infection from being bitten by a mosquito carrying the virus. Horses are dead-end hosts; that is, they do not transmit the virus to other horses, animals, or people.

Testing of horse samples has identified twenty-six horses with probable Japanese encephalitis (JE) infection and four horses as possible JE cases. These horses were probably exposed to JE virus during peak mosquito activity this season i.e., summer to mid-autumn 2022. No cases of JE in NSW horses have been definitively confirmed. However, the combination of clinical signs and test results suggests that Japanese encephalitis infection is a probable or possible cause of the disease.

The clinical presentation of JE is similar to other mosquito-borne diseases such as infection with West Nile/ Kunjin virus and Murray Valley encephalitis virus and to Hendra virus infection. As Hendra virus can be transmitted directly from horses to people, it is important to take appropriate personal protective precautions when caring for affected horses while waiting for test results.

In horses many JE cases are asymptomatic and most clinical disease is mild, however more severe encephalitis can occur which may be fatal. Signs include fever, jaundice, lethargy, anorexia and neurological signs which vary with severity of the clinical disease. Neurological signs can include incoordination, difficulty swallowing, impaired vision, and rarely a hyperexcitable form occurs. Disease has also been reported in donkeys.

If your **horse is unwell, please contact your private veterinarian**. If you suspect Japanese encephalitis in horses, contact the **Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline on 1800 675 888** (24-hours)

Additional Information regarding JE and animals

- NSW Department of Primary Industries webpage: Japanese encephalitis - Horses – available at <https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/animals-and-livestock/horses/health-and-disease/japanese-encephalitis-in-horses>
- NSW Department of Primary Industries webpage: Japanese encephalitis information for vets – available at <https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/biosecurity/animal/info-vets/japanese-encephalitis>
- Farm Biosecurity webpage: Controlling mosquito around piggeries – available at: <https://www.farmbiosecurity.com.au/livestock/pigs/controlling-mosquitoes-around-piggeries/>

Additional information regarding protecting people from JE infection

Please go to NSW Health webpages:

- Public health alert – mosquito warning webpage: available at https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/news/Pages/20220226_02.aspx
- Mosquitoes are a health hazard – Communicable diseases factsheet: available at <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/factsheets/Factsheets/mosquitoes-health-hazard.pdf>
- Mosquito bite avoidance factsheet: available at <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/environment/factsheets/Documents/mosquito-bite-avoidance.pdf>

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