

11 July 2011

CVO bulletin to NSW veterinarians re: Hendra virus challenges

Infected Property 4 near Kempsey

On the 10 July 2013 a fourth case of Hendra virus was confirmed in a 13 year old quarterhorse mare near Kempsey. It highlights the challenges facing veterinarians when diagnosing and managing these cases. The mare had been struggling to maintain condition since foaling 10 months prior. The foal was weaned. The mare then showed a change in demeanor and became slow, lethargic and reluctant to move. It was treated with penicillin for 1 week. On the 8 July the mare was intermittently recumbent and showing neurological signs, ultimately becoming entangled in a fence. When sampled the horse was dull with a heart rate of 68, pyrexia, injected mucous membranes, periocular trauma, jaundice, bruxism and mucosal ulceration. The horse was euthanased. It was considered possible but not likely to be Hendra virus.

Amendment re description of clinical signs in previous cases

All of these cases had normal or only mildly elevated temperatures when examined. Hendra should not be dismissed as a differential diagnosis based on the absence of a fever.

Complications in recent Hendra virus exclusions (not specifically this case)

- Movement of the horse whilst it was ill further spread the possible Hendra virus contamination and made management more difficult,
- Multiple people and other animals exposed to body fluids from a sick horse,
- Only whole blood sent to EMAI for sampling and as a result, initial results were inconclusive, thus delaying the diagnosis.

Do's and Don'ts of Veterinary Management of suspect Hendra cases

DO use appropriate PPE when handling, examining and sampling sick horses. Take particular care when stomach-tubing sick horses.

DO ensure as many samples as possible are submitted for diagnosis - this should include EDTA blood, whole blood, lithium heparin blood and swabs from as mucous membrane sites as possible whilst still ensuring personal safety. Swabs should include nasal, oral, vaginal and anal mucous membrane samples.

DO familiarise yourself with the submission requirements detailed in the Vet Lab Manual on the NSW DPI website (<http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/vetmanual/submission>)

DO consider Lyssavirus as an alternative diagnosis to Hendra virus but be aware of the heightened risk associated with removing brains from Hendra cases.

DO advise the owner to:

- NOT allow sick horses to be handled by children or other people.
- NOT allow sick horses to contact companion or other horses.
- NOT allow dogs or other animals to contact sick/ deceased horses. Ensure they are restrained well away from the sick horse and its body fluids.
- NOT move sick horses to another area as this spreads the infection.

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 (11 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.

