

INFORMATION FOR VETS

Hendra virus Work Health and Safety responsibilities

July 2014

Hendra virus infection in horses continues to create significant work health and safety, public health and biosecurity risks. Equine veterinarians should regularly review their Hendra virus risk management systems to ensure that human and animal health risks are minimised so far as is reasonably practicable.

Vaccination of horses is encouraged and veterinarians should discuss this with their clients. Vaccination of horses is the most effective way to help manage Hendra virus disease and provides a work health and safety and public health benefit.

Veterinarians should ensure early diagnostic consideration of Hendra virus when attending sick horses, and adopt the precautionary principle where uncertainty exists. Infection control practices to minimise Hendra virus risks include wearing suitable personal protective equipment (PPE) to protect against contact with the horse and its blood and body substances, and adopting personal hygiene and decontamination practices. All persons who are at risk, including assisting persons, should be properly protected.

Safe sharps handling and disposal practices are also important to minimise the risk of sharps injuries. Safety engineered sharps, such as retractable blood collection units and retractable needles and syringes, should be considered. Used sharps should be disposed of promptly into a sharps container that meets relevant Australian Standards. Recapping of needles is a high risk activity for sharps injuries and should be avoided.

Human contact with suspect Hendra virus cases should be limited to essential activities only and suspect horses should be isolated from other animals until the Hendra virus status of the horse is determined by laboratory testing.

Veterinarians should ensure that horse owners are provided with information on how to ensure personal safety and biosecurity while waiting for Hendra virus test results. A fact sheet that provides veterinary advice for horse owners titled [Waiting for Hendra virus test results](#) is available from the NSW Department of Primary Industries website.

If the veterinarian determines that a suspect Hendra virus horse requires ongoing treatment before the Hendra virus test results are received, a risk assessment should be made to ensure the health and safety of the person administering the treatment. Anyone who has close contact with a suspect Hendra virus horse (e.g. to administer oral medications or injections) should follow appropriate infection control measures including PPE, safe sharps handling and disposal, hand hygiene and decontamination. They should also be provided with any information, instruction, training or supervision that is necessary to ensure their health and safety.

For more information:

- Hendra virus and work health and safety, contact the [Workcover Authority of NSW](#) or call 131 050
- Hendra virus and animal health or biosecurity, contact [Department of Primary Industries](#) or 1800 808 095
- Hendra virus and human health, contact [NSW Health](#) or call 1300 066 055.

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