21 July 2011

HARNESS RACING AUSTRALIA (HRA) HENDRA VIRUS FACT SHEET

Originally called 'equine morbillivirus', it was renamed Hendra virus (HeV) when subsequently fully characterised, and became the first member of the new genus *Henipavirus*. The name 'Hendra' reflects the name of the Brisbane suburb where the disease was first detected.

Australia is the only country that has recorded any outbreaks of Hendra virus.

Hendra virus has been identified in fruit bats (flying foxes) in all areas of Australia and in bats in Papua New Guinea, but the cases have been isolated to northern, central and southern coastal Queensland and Northern New South Wales.

Horses affected by Hendra virus typically suffer acute onset of illness, with increased body temperature, increased heart rate, may appear depressed, show little appetite, and appear restless or colicky. This rapidly progresses to cardiovascular collapse and either respiratory or neurological signs with death occurring in 75% of cases.

The current Hendra virus incidents are the latest of 19 known incidents since the virus was first identified in 1994. Some have been single-horse incidents and some have been multiple-horse incidents, with a total of 55 horses identified as confirmed or possible cases.

People who have close contact with secretions from the infected horse, such as vets, trainers or handlers, are at risk of contracting the disease and dying. AAHL research (2009) suggests that the stronger the signs of Hendra virus, the more infectious the horse is likely to be.

The following clinical signs have been taken from *Hendra guidelines for vets* on the Biosecurity Queensland website.

Seven humans have contracted this serious disease from infected horses and four have died as a result.

What to look for:

Key signs:

- acute onset of illness
- increased body temperature
- increased heart rate
- discomfort / weight shifting between legs
- depression
- rapid deterioration

Other respiratory signs:

- pulmonary oedema and congestion
- respiratory distress—increased respiratory rates
- terminal nasal discharge—can be initially clear, watery discharge progressing to stable white froth and/or stable blood-stained froth
- terminal weakness, loss of control of muscle movement and collapse

Other neurological signs:

- 'wobbly gait' progressing to loss of control of muscle movement
- altered consciousness—apparent loss of vision in one or both eyes, aimless walking in a dazed state
- head tilting, circling
- muscle twitching
- urinary incontinence
- lying down with inability to get up

Reduce the risk:

To reduce the risk to people and horses, there are a number of measures being promoted by Biosecurity Queensland and NSW Primary Industries that horse owners and trainers can take to reduce the risk of horses becoming infected with Hendra virus:

- Practice good biosecurity, and not travel, work on or take unwell horses to other properties or events
- Ensure that sick horses are isolated from other horses, people and animals until a veterinarian's opinion is obtained
- Remove horse feed and water containers from under trees. If possible, place feed and water containers under a shelter
- Remove horses from paddocks where flowering/fruiting trees have resulted in a temporary surge in flying fox numbers. Horses can be returned after the trees have stopped flowering/fruiting
- If it is not possible to remove horses from paddocks, try to temporarily remove your horses during times of peak flying fox activity (usually at dusk and during the night) or fence off access to trees that are identified as attractive to flying foxes

Visit the attached links from the responsible NSW and Qld Departments which are regularly updated. (click on State names to view)

Compiled with thanks to Australian Veterinary Association, NSW Primary Industries, Biosecurity Queensland and the Australian Racing Board.