

Horse Industry Update



Government of South Australia

Biosecurity SA

Hendra virus

Biosecurity SA is continuing to monitor the occurrence of Hendra virus cases in Queensland and northern New South Wales. One new case of Hendra virus in a horse was confirmed in Beachmere, Queensland on the 10 October 2011. Since the 26 June 2011 there has been 22 horses confirmed with Hendra virus infection comprising of 10 incidents involving 12 horses in Queensland and 8 incidents involving 10 horses in NSW. There has been one dog that sero-converted in Queensland. No human cases have occurred in either state.

Horse owners can find more information regarding these cases on the respective state government websites

<http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/livestock/horses/health/general/hendra-virus>

http://www.dpi.qld.gov.au/4790_2900.htm

Hendra virus is carried by flying foxes (fruit bats) and is thought to be transmitted to horses through urine and birthing fluids. People have also contracted the virus from infected horses.

This year, the number of cases detected and the duration of the outbreak is greater than has been previously experienced in Australia. The cause of this is not known at this time but seasonal influences may have altered the behaviour of the flying foxes.

While there has never been a case of Hendra virus in horses detected in South Australia horse owners need to be aware that this is a possibility. Currently there is only one small colony of Grey Headed Flying Foxes known to be located in South Australia (Adelaide) and these animals potentially could carry Hendra virus. This colony has reduced in size from its peak of 300-400 to 100-200 flying foxes. A colony in the South East reported earlier this year has dispersed. It is not known whether the bats have relocated to the eastern states or have new roosts in South Australia.

The public is advised to not handle flying foxes and to contact the Department of Environment and Natural Resources on (08) 8336 0926 or email

FlyingFoxWatch@sa.gov.au to report activities of these animals.

While these fruit bats may carry the virus, we believe local factors mean the risk to South Australian horses is much lower than it is in Queensland and northern NSW.

Nonetheless, all horse owners in South Australia should take steps to minimise the potential for contact between the flying foxes and their horses. These steps include:

- Place feed and water containers under cover if possible but *not* under trees, particularly if flying foxes are attracted to those trees.
- Do not use feed that might be attractive to flying foxes if they are known to be in the area, for example, fruit and vegetables or anything sweet such as molasses.
- If possible, remove horses from paddocks where flowering trees have resulted in a temporary surge in flying fox numbers. Return the horses after the trees have stopped flowering.

If removal of horses from these paddocks is not possible, try to temporarily remove your horses during times of peak flying fox activity (usually at dusk and during the night); and

- Wash your hands with soap and water regularly during and after handling multiple horses.
- Keep any sick horses isolated from other horses, people and animals until you have obtained a veterinary opinion.
- Do not allow visiting horse practitioners (farriers, etc) to work on sick horses. They should only work on healthy horses.
- If there is more than one horse on your property, handle unaffected horses first and then only handle sick horses after taking appropriate precautions.
- Make sure gear exposed to any body fluids from horses is cleaned and disinfected before it is used on other horses. This includes things like halters, lead ropes and twitches. Talk to your vet about cleaning agents and disinfectants to use.
- Seek veterinary advice before bringing any sick horse back to your property.

Further details can be found in the fact sheet on the Biosecurity SA website:

http://www.pir.sa.gov.au/pirsa/more/factsheets/fact_sheets/animals_and_livestock/horse/flying-foxes_and_hendra_virus_150_advice_for_horse_owners

It is also possible that a horse infected with Hendra virus could be transported into South Australia from interstate. All new horses should be isolated from other horses on arrival for three weeks and closely monitored for signs of illness.

Biosecurity SA is working with private veterinary practitioners to test sick horses and exclude Hendra virus as a cause of the illness. All horses tested to date have returned negative results.

The signs of Hendra virus infection are not specific and any unwell horse should be seen immediately by a veterinarian to determine if Hendra virus could be causing the illness. Testing to exclude Hendra virus can be organised if necessary and Biosecurity SA can assist with the cost of this exclusion testing.

If horse owners suspect that their horse may have Hendra virus or has a sudden onset of severe neurological, respiratory or colic signs then they need to:

- Phone a private veterinary practitioner to examine the horse
- Notify Biosecurity SA on the Emergency Animal Disease Hotline **1800 675 888**; and
- Isolate the sick horse and minimise human contact.

Horse owners are also reminded of the need (and benefit) of having a Property Identification Code (PIC) for their properties. One PIC covers all animals and species on a property.

Having all horse owners registered with a PIC enables Biosecurity SA to identify where and in what numbers horses are kept, which is vital information that is needed to respond effectively to animal health threats such as Hendra, and promptly inform all horse owners of actions that need to be taken.

If you have any concerns or questions about Hendra virus please contact Biosecurity SA on (08) 8207 7900.