

# Hendra virus – Information for horse owners

## What is Hendra virus?

Hendra virus is a virus of flying foxes (fruit bats) which, on very rare occasions, may cause serious disease in horses and people; it can be fatal.

## How is it spread?

Flying foxes are the natural hosts for the virus and do not show signs when infected by it. Infected bats may transmit the virus to horses, which can then infect other horses or humans.

## Bats to horses

Horses may become infected when in close contact with an infected flying fox or its body secretions (e.g. urine, saliva or faeces).

## Horse to horse

The virus can spread between horses via direct contact with body fluids or contaminated gear.

## Horse to human

People can contract the virus from exposure to body fluids of infected horses.

## Signs of Hendra virus in horses

Hendra virus can cause a range of signs in horses and should be considered in any sick horse where the cause of illness is unknown. Signs may include:

- A rapid onset of illness.
- Fever.
- An increased heart rate.
- Laboured breathing.
- Depression.
- A nasal discharge.
- Stumbling.
- Incoordination.
- Blindness.

## Occurrence in the Northern Territory (NT)

There have been no known cases of Hendra virus infection in horses or people in the NT. Testing has shown that flying foxes have been exposed to Hendra virus in the NT.

## How to reduce the risk of horses becoming infected

- Remove feed and water containers from under trees where flying foxes feed or roost.
- Remove flowers and fruit from trees in horse paddocks, or remove horses from paddocks with flowering or fruiting trees.
- Temporarily remove horses from the paddock during times of peak flying fox activity.
- Prevent contact with items which may have been contaminated with body fluids of flying foxes (saliva, nasal discharge, urine, faeces).
- Clean and disinfect gear exposed to body fluids of a horse before using on another horse, especially halters, ropes, twitches and stomach drenches.
- Routinely wash hands with soap and water before and after handling horses
- Isolate sick horses from other horses, animals and people and seek immediate veterinary advice.
- Use personal protective equipment when handling sick horses.

Practise good biosecurity; never travel with, work on, or transport sick horses

**Vaccination against Hendra virus is the most effective way to reduce the risk of Hendra virus infection in horses. Discuss this option with your vet.**

Hendra virus infection is a notifiable disease and all suspect cases should be reported to the Chief Veterinary Officer or the Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline 1800 675 888.

## For more information contact your regional Animal Biosecurity Office

- Darwin 8999 2035
- Katherine 8973 9716
- Tennant Creek 8962 4458
- Alice Springs 8951 818