

# Hendra virus

## What to do while waiting for Hendra virus test results

If your veterinarian thinks your horse may have Hendra virus (HeV), they will take samples for laboratory testing. Initial test results are usually available within 24 hours of the laboratory receiving the sample. If you have handled a sick horse, wash off any contamination with soap and water, shower and wash your hair and change clothing and footwear before handling any other horses.

## Caring for horses

Although only a few people have even been infected with Hendra virus, all of these people caught the infection from horses. Strict precautions must be taken while awaiting HeV test results.

- If possible, **avoid close contact** (within five metres) with the sick horse/s until HeV has been ruled out. Prevent children having contact with sick or dead horses, or their wastes.
- **Isolate** sick horses from other horses, people and animals if safe to do so. Ideally, leave the sick horse where it is and move other animals to a different area of the property.
- **Observe** horses from a distance and notify your veterinarian immediately of any change in the health status of any horses on the property.

If you must have close contact with a horse under investigation

- Always have contact with the sick horse last; handle unaffected horses first.
- Cover any cuts and abrasions you might have with a water-resistant dressing
- Put on personal protective equipment (PPE) before approaching the horse. Your veterinarian can help you obtain the following for your PPE kit:
  - P2 respirator (particulate respirator) - ensure a correct fit and face seal. Facial hair can interfere with the face seal; people not clean-shaven should use a powered air purifying respirator (PAPR), which draws air in through a filter and supplies it to a hood worn over the head
  - disposable gloves (Two pairs)
  - disposable overalls (with long sleeves and hood)
  - safety glasses
  - facial shields
  - rubber boots
- After handling any horse, remove and dispose of the PPE carefully, making no contact with your facial area, particularly your eyes, mouth and nose
- Immediately wash your hands with soap and water, and dry or use hand wipes and waterless hand hygiene solution
- Provide feed and water for any horses on the property from a distance, if required.

## Caring for other animals

Some other species of animals, such as dogs, cats and pigs are known to be susceptible to HeV infection. If they become infected they may pose a risk to humans.

- Confine all pets to prevent contact with the sick horse, its carcass or body fluids.
- Practice strict hygiene when handling any animal, especially those that may have had contact with the sick horse or its body fluids and wastes.

## Managing a carcass

The owner or person in charge of the horse is responsible for the disposal of the carcass if the horse under investigation is euthanased or dies.

- Avoid contact with the carcass
- Restrict access to the carcass until a disposal method is can be undertaken safely.

Advise anyone disposing of the carcass that the horse is under investigation for HeV and to take the precautions outlined in the *Guidelines for veterinarians handling potential Hendra virus infection in horses* (reference below).

The Department of Primary Industry and Resources (DPIR) can provide advice on the disposal of HeV infected carcasses. The owner may dispose of the carcass using normal methods if HeV is excluded from diagnosis or not suspected.

## Test results

If the test result is **negative**, your veterinarian may wish to take further samples to investigate your horse's illness. You should continue to monitor your horse and notify your veterinarian immediately of any change in the health status of any horses.

If the test result is **positive**, it will be forwarded to a reference laboratory to confirm the test result. In the meantime, the DPIR will work with you and your veterinarian to manage the situation. The property where the HeV positive horse is located will be placed under quarantine by DPIR. As part of the quarantine, the following procedures are likely to occur:

- All horses on the property will be monitored and tested for HeV.
- Any horses that have moved off the property recently will be traced and tested for HeV.
- Testing and monitoring may be carried out, and movement restrictions placed on, neighboring properties with horses, depending on the level of risk for infection with HeV.
- Other animals on the property may be tested for HeV, including pets.
- It is the horse owner's responsibility to meet the general husbandry needs of their horses during the quarantine, including any non-HeV illnesses or injuries.

Once there is conclusive evidence that no other animals have been infected with HeV, the quarantine on the property will be lifted.

## Human health

DPIR will contact the Centre for Disease Control (CDC) when HeV is confirmed or strongly suspected on a property and there is a risk of human exposure to the virus. CDC will work with people at risk to decide if monitoring or medical assistance is required. If you have concerns about a person's health at any time, seek medical advice from your general practitioner, local hospital emergency department or CDC.

## Media

Any media enquiries should be directed to the DPIR Media Manager on 08 8999 2073.

## Further information

Visit the Business Queensland to read the [Guidelines for veterinarians handling potential Hendra virus infection in horses](#).<sup>1</sup>

### Contact your regional Animal Biosecurity Office

- Darwin 8999 2035
- Katherine 8973 9716
- Tennant Creek 8962 4458
- Alice Springs 8951 8181

**[www.dpir.nt.gov.au](http://www.dpir.nt.gov.au)**

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<sup>1</sup> [www.business.qld.gov.au/industries/service-industries-professionals/service-industries/veterinary-surgeons/guidelines-hendra](http://www.business.qld.gov.au/industries/service-industries-professionals/service-industries/veterinary-surgeons/guidelines-hendra)