

# Hendra Virus

## Information for veterinarians

### What is Hendra virus?

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

#### Transmission

- Flying foxes are the natural host for Hendra virus (HeV) and do not show clinical signs.
- The virus may spread from flying fox to horse, horse to horse or horse to human.
- The exact route of transmission to the horse is unknown; it is likely through consumption of material contaminated by infected flying fox bodily fluids and excretions.
- Reported situations have mostly involved one horse without others becoming infected.
- HeV has been transmitted to people through very close contact with bodily fluid, especially respiratory secretions, from an infected horse.

### Occurrence in the Northern Territory

There have been no known cases of HeV infection in horses or people in the NT. The black flying fox and the little red flying fox are found around the Top End and NT bats have tested seropositive for HeV.

### Advice to horse owners

Information for NT horse owners detailing steps for the protection of horses and people is available on our website. Veterinarians should continue to encourage all horse owners to strongly consider HeV vaccination of their horses.

*Hendra virus infection is a notifiable disease and all suspect cases should be reported to the Chief Veterinary Officer.*

**For more information contact your regional Animal Biosecurity Office**

Darwin 8999 2035

Katherine 8973 9716

Tennant Creek 8962 4458

Alice Springs 8951 8181

### Clinical signs in horses

HeV can cause a range of clinical signs in horses and should be considered in any sick horse where the cause of illness is unknown, especially where there is;

- Rapid onset of illness
- Respiratory signs
- Pyrexia
- Neurological signs
- Tachycardia
- Rapid progression to death

The incubation period of HeV in horses is usually between 5-16 days. Most horses die within two days of developing clinical signs.

**It should be noted that HeV can be excreted 2 days prior to clinical signs; diligent use of PPE during examination is crucial.**

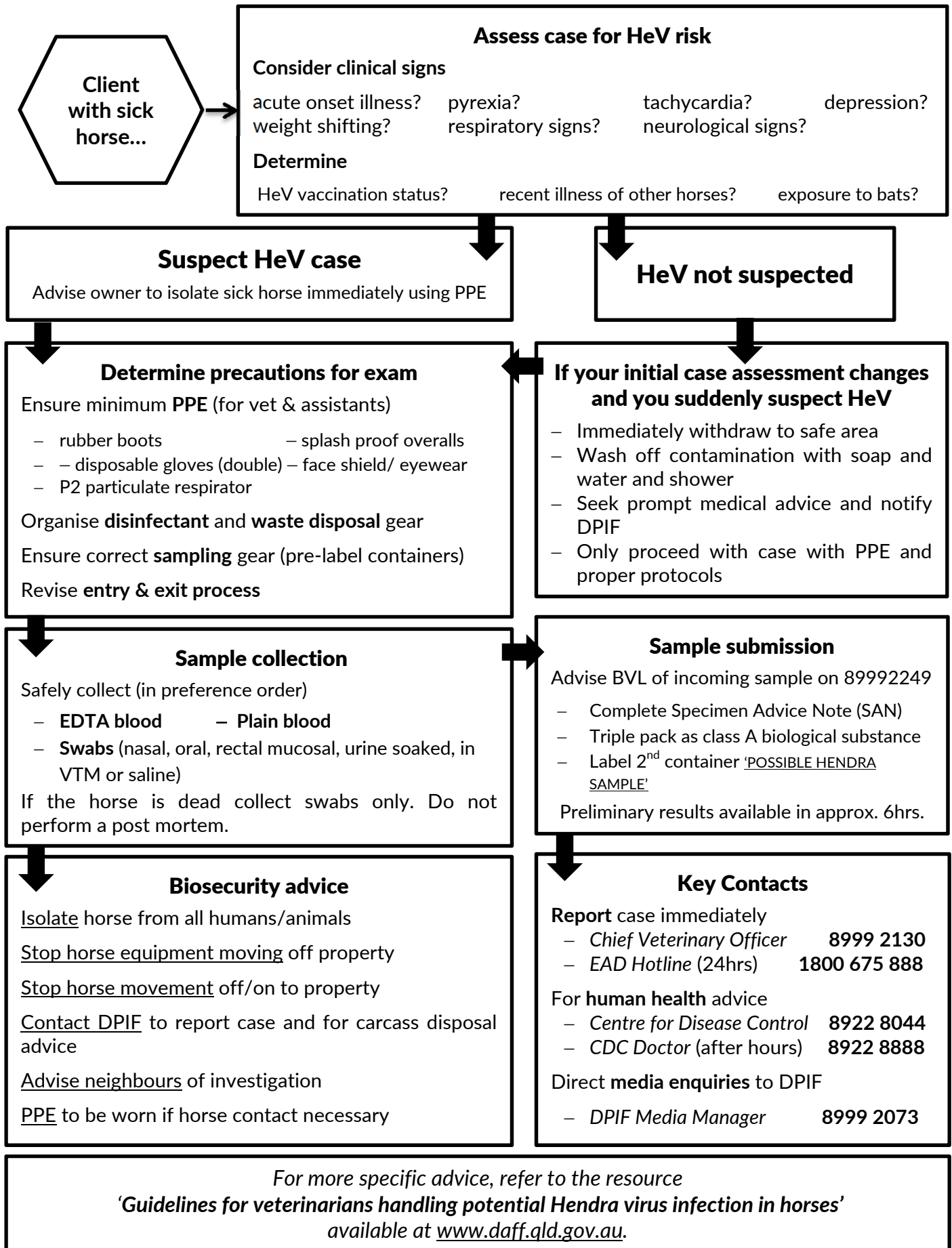
### Investigation of a suspected case

Initial investigation of horses with acute disease is performed by the local private veterinarian. An example investigation protocol is outlined on the next page.

If HeV is suspected, contact the Chief Veterinary Officer on 8999 2130 or the Emergency Animal Disease hotline on 1800 675 888.

Private veterinarians who examine horses should be familiar with the document 'Guidelines for veterinarians handling potential Hendra virus infections in horses' available for download at [www.daff.qld.gov.au](http://www.daff.qld.gov.au).

# Procedure for investigating a potential case of Hendra virus



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