| Hendra Virus |
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Information for horse owners

## What is Hendra virus?

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

### How is it spread?

Flying foxes are the natural host 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 horse.** Horses may become infected when in close contact with an infected flying fox or it’s body secretions (eg. urine, saliva, 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

* Rapid onset of illness
* Fever
* Increased heart rate
* Laboured breathing
* Depression
* Nasal discharge
* Stumbling
* Incoordination
* Blindness

## Occurrence in the Northern Territory

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

## 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 bodily fluids (saliva, nasal discharge, urine, faeces) of flying foxes
* Clean and disinfect gear exposed to bodily 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 horse from other horses, animals and people and seek immediate vet advice
* Use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) when handling sick horses
* Practice good biosecurity- never travel with, work on or travel 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.*