

23 June 2014

## CVO Bulletin to Veterinarians: Hendra Virus case at Murwillumbah

An unvaccinated 31 year old stock horse was found in a dam on a property west of Murwillumbah at about lunch time on Thursday 19 June 2014. It was hypothermic (28° Celcius), glassy eyed, recumbent, had progressive lip paralysis and intermittent tremors that recurred when stimulated. There was no nasal discharge. The treating veterinarian wore appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) before administering warmed intravenous fluids. Blood samples and nasal and rectal swabs were collected and laboratory testing of all samples was positive to Hendra virus.

The horse later became febrile and died in the early hours of Friday 21 June 2014. The property has been quarantined and the dead horse has been buried. There are 5 other horses on the property which so far remain well. They have been tested and vaccinated and remain under observation.

There are no dogs or cats on the property and no neighbouring horses. There have been no recent horses movements off the property. There is regular flying fox activity in the area.

## Reminders for Veterinarians

This case is a timely reminder of 3 very important things:

1. We are entering the season when Hendra virus is more common i.e. the cooler months of the year.
2. Veterinarians must remain vigilant in their use of PPE when examining/handling horses. As this case highlights, horses with Hendra virus can present in a variety of ways. Owners should be made aware of the risks and along with children and domestic pets, should be discouraged from having close contact with sick horses.
3. Horse owners should be encouraged to vaccinate their horses for Hendra virus to protect both the horses themselves, but also their human handlers.

## Do's and Don'ts of Veterinary Management of suspect Hendra cases

DO advise the owner to:

- ALWAYS USE PPE when handling sick horses
- NOT allow sick horses to be handled by children or other people.
- Isolate allow sick horses from pets or other horses.
- NOT allow dogs or other animals to contact sick/ deceased horses. Ensure they are restrained well away from the sick horse and its body fluids.
- NOT move sick horses to another area as this spreads the infection.

DO use appropriate PPE when handling, examining and sampling sick horses. Take particular care when stomach-tubing sick horses.

DO ensure as many samples as possible are submitted for diagnosis - this should include EDTA blood, whole blood, lithium heparin blood and swabs from as many mucous membrane sites as possible whilst still ensuring personal safety. Swabs should include nasal, oral, vaginal and anal mucous membrane samples.

DO familiarise yourself with the submission requirements detailed in the Vet Lab Manual on the NSW DPI website (<http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/vetmanual/submission>)

DO consider Lyssavirus as an alternative diagnosis to Hendra virus.

### *Further information*

The DPI website "[Hendra virus- Information for vets](#)" contains information on

- Biosecurity guidelines and other Veterinary advice
- Sampling, packaging, submission and transport of specimens
- Human health issues (or phone NSW Health on 1300 066 055)
- Work Health and Safety Responsibilities (or phone Workcover Authority of NSW 131050).

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

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Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (23 June 2014 ). However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that information upon which they rely is up to date and to check currency of the information with the appropriate officer of NSW Department Primary Industries or the user's independent adviser.

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