

## Media Release - Hendra virus 21/05/10

### **Biosecurity Queensland confirms Hendra Virus case**

Biosecurity Queensland has received laboratory results today (Thursday May 20) confirming a positive Hendra Virus result for a horse on a property in Tewantin.

Primary Industries Minister Tim Mulherin said officers from Biosecurity Queensland and Queensland Health are currently on the property talking to the owners and any other people who may have had contact with the affected horse.

"We are taking the situation very seriously and are working closely with the property owners, and the vet involved, and will be contacting neighbours as soon as possible" Mr Mulherin said.

Senior Director, Queensland Health Communicable Diseases Branch Dr Christine Selvey said all people who were identified as having been in close contact with the horse, including the owners, would be offered free testing and counselling.

Dr Selvey said there had only been seven confirmed cases of Hendra virus in humans and it was important to note there had been no cases of transmission from human to human.

"All human infections have occurred following direct exposure to tissues and secretions from infected or dead horses," Dr Selvey said.

"Symptoms in humans have included an influenza-like illness, which can progress to pneumonia; or encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) type symptoms, that is, headache, high fever, and drowsiness, which can progress to more serious illness.

Dr Selvey said symptoms in humans generally presented within five to 21 days of exposure to the virus.

Mr Mulherin said Biosecurity officers would quarantine the property as a precautionary measure as the virus could have affected another horse on the property.

"The positive sample was sent to Biosecurity Queensland labs for testing by the local vet who attended the sick horse on Monday 17 May," Mr Mulherin said.

"The vet suspected the horse's illness could have been caused by either toxicity or Hendra and took the appropriate samples.

"He is to be congratulated for wearing appropriate protective gear while working with the affected horse.

"At the time of testing the vet made the decision to humanely put down the horse, due to the severity of its illness.

"There is one other horse on the property which will be tested but currently shows no sign of illness at this stage."

"Officers from Biosecurity Queensland will be on the ground in Tewantin tomorrow with information about the Hendra virus," Mr Mulherin said.

Chief Biosecurity Officer Ron Glanville said Hendra is a serious but rare disease which occasionally affects horses and can be passed from horses to humans.

"Since the incidents at Cawarral and Bowen in 2009 the Government has made significant efforts to promote awareness, risk reduction and support preparedness for the next Hendra incident.

"The key approach to prevention and preparedness for Hendra has been to promote known risk reduction practices through a targeted communication and engagement plan with the veterinary profession, the general horse community in Queensland and across Government agencies.

"The Queensland Government including Biosecurity Queensland, Queensland Health and Workplace Health and Safety Queensland has been working with the Queensland Horse Council and the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) to promote the required changes to horse handling and work practices.

"Biosecurity Queensland convened five veterinarian workshops in 2009 in Malanda, Toowoomba, Brisbane, Rockhampton and Townsville which included presentations on: general infection control principles for practicing veterinarians, workplace health and safety requirements and advice on personal protective equipment (PPE).

"There has also been significant community engagement promoting Hendra awareness and precautions with those in contact with horses including 15 Hendra seminars across the state attended by 563 horse owners since October 2009, including one on April 27th in Beerwah attended by 42 people.

"The level of increased awareness within the veterinary profession is highlighted in this incident with the Cooroy vet suspecting Hendra and sending a sample to the Biosecurity Queensland lab for testing.

"This latest incident is a reminder to all horse owners and vets to remain vigilant in practicing protective measures - including ensuring all horse feeding and watering troughs are clear from known fly fox roosts.

Prior to this incident there have been 13 known Hendra Virus incidents since 1994.