

## Workplace Health and Safety Queensland

## Hendra virus – information for businesses that dispose of horse carcasses

### Background

Hendra virus is a disease of horses and humans that can cause a serious and life threatening illness. The natural hosts of Hendra virus are flying foxes, which can occasionally transmit the infection to horses. Human infection results from close contact with infected horses and their blood, tissues and body fluids.

There is no evidence that Hendra virus is spread directly from flying foxes to humans or from human to human.

Clinical signs of Hendra virus infection in horses can include rapid onset of illness, increased body temperature and heart rate, depression, and respiratory and/or neurological signs. Not all of these signs will be found in any one infected horse.

### Risk

Hendra virus incidents are uncommon. However, the potential seriousness of the disease for both humans and horses requires that health and safety measures are implemented to prevent human infection at workplaces where horse carcasses are moved, transported and disposed of. Sound hygiene measures should be adopted as a routine work practice for all contact with horse carcasses.

### Prevention

Management of Hendra virus cases requires careful planning using a risk based approach. A plan should be developed for the transport and disposal of a dead horse that is suspected or confirmed to be infected with Hendra virus. The plan should include how the risk of disease transmission will be

minimised to workers and others. Workers should then be trained in the implementation of the plan.

The following measures should be considered:

- Ensure safe systems are used as a routine work practice for contact with horse carcasses and associated blood, tissues and body fluids. These include:
  - hand hygiene
  - cleaning equipment and machinery used to move, transport and dispose of a horse carcass.
- Keep sufficient personal protective equipment (PPE) (e.g. disposable gloves, overalls, safety eyewear, disposable P2 respirator) and alcohol-based hand rubs or wipes readily available at places where horse carcasses are disposed of (e.g. in the work vehicle), to provide protection for any unavoidable contact with a horse's blood, tissues and body fluids. Train workers in the correct use of PPE.
- Perform hand hygiene using running water and soap followed by hand drying, or use an alcohol-based hand rub if no visible soiling:
  - before eating and drinking
  - after contact with a horse carcass and its blood, tissues and body fluids
  - after cleaning equipment or machinery used to move a horse carcass

- after removing PPE.
- Minimise contact with the horse carcass and its blood, tissues and body fluids.
- If contact with the horse is unavoidable (e.g. to place chains) wear sufficient PPE to protect against splashes or contact with the horse's blood, tissues and body fluids.
- Do not dismember (cut up) the horse carcass for transport and disposal.
- If the horse has been euthanased or undergone a post mortem, be aware of sharp objects like needles or bone.
- If the horse carcass is leaking body fluids, ensure this is contained where practicable prior to movement.
- Dispose of contaminated soil and items with the carcass.
- Make sure to transport the horse carcass, contaminated soil etc. in a vehicle made of materials that can be easily cleaned.
- Clean any part of equipment or machinery that comes into contact with the horse carcass and its blood, tissues or body fluids. Avoid splashes when cleaning (e.g. do not use a high pressure hose).
- Keep a first aid kit readily available (e.g. in the work vehicle) so that any cuts can be covered before touching a horse carcass and its blood, tissues or body fluids.
- If a worker becomes contaminated with the horse's blood or body fluids, wash off the contamination with running water and soap.
- Seek medical advice or ring Queensland Health 13 HEALTH (1300 43 25 84) if a worker has had

unprotected contact with a horse carcass that is suspected or confirmed to be infected with Hendra virus.

- If you are moving, transporting or disposing of a horse carcass where Hendra virus is suspected or confirmed, follow any directions provided by Biosecurity Queensland officers.
- Disposal may include burial of the carcass at a minimum hole/trench depth of 2 metres without striking a water table. Disposal can also be carried out by burning the carcass. This may require a permit from the local fire authority.

### Further information

For more information on workplace health and safety visit [www.worksafe.qld.gov.au](http://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au) or call the Workplace Health and Safety Queensland Infoline on 1300 369 915.

For more information on Hendra virus in horses and biosecurity contact Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23 or visit the Biosecurity Queensland at [www.biosecurity.qld.gov.au](http://www.biosecurity.qld.gov.au) to download more Hendra virus information for veterinarians, horse owners, horse industries and communities.

For more information on Hendra virus in humans, contact Queensland Health [www.health.qld.gov.au](http://www.health.qld.gov.au) or 13HEALTH (13 43 25 84).

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