

Are you prepared for a possible Hendra virus incident?

Hendra virus infection in horses continues to create significant work health and safety, public health and biosecurity risks. Equine veterinarians should regularly review their Hendra virus risk management systems to ensure that human and animal health risks are minimised so far as is reasonably practicable.

Vaccination of horses is strongly encouraged and veterinarians should discuss this with their clients. The Hendra virus vaccine is the single most effective way of reducing the risk of Hendra virus infection in horses and provides a work health and safety and public health benefit.

Veterinarians should ensure early diagnostic consideration of Hendra virus when attending sick horses, and adopt the precautionary principle where uncertainty exists. Infection control practices to minimise Hendra virus risks include wearing suitable personal protective equipment (PPE) to protect against contact with the horse and its blood and body substances, and adopting personal hygiene and decontamination practices. All persons who are at risk, including assisting persons, should be properly protected.

Safe sharps handling and disposal practices are also important to minimise the risk of sharps injuries. Safety engineered sharps, such as retractable blood collection units and retractable needles and syringes, should be considered. Used sharps should be disposed of promptly into a sharps container that meets relevant Australian Standards. Recapping of needles is a high risk activity for sharps injuries and should be avoided.

Human contact with suspect Hendra virus cases should be limited to essential activities only and suspect horses should be isolated from other animals until the Hendra virus status of the horse is determined by laboratory testing.

Veterinarians should ensure that horse owners are provided with information on how to ensure personal safety and biosecurity while waiting for Hendra virus test results. A fact sheet that provides veterinary advice for horse owners on what to do while waiting for Hendra virus test results is available from the website of the NSW Department of Primary Industries (<http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/livestock/horses/health/general/hendra-virus/response-docs>)

If the veterinarian determines that a suspect Hendra virus horse requires ongoing treatment before the Hendra virus test results are received, a risk assessment should be made to ensure the health and safety of the person administering the treatment. Anyone who has close contact with a suspect Hendra virus horse (e.g. to administer oral medications or injections) should follow appropriate infection control measures including PPE, safe sharps handling and disposal, hand hygiene and decontamination. They should also be provided with any information, instruction, training or supervision that is necessary to ensure their health and safety.

For more information on Hendra virus and work health and safety, contact the [Workcover Authority of NSW](#) on 131050

For more information on Hendra virus and animal health or biosecurity, contact the NSW Department of Primary Industries on 1800 808 095 or <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/livestock/horses/health/general/hendra-virus>

For more information on Hendra virus and human health, contact NSW Health on 1300 066 055 or visit http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/factsheets/Pages/Hendra_virus.aspx