

cooroora VETERINARY CLINIC

providing comprehensive professional services
to domestic pets, horses & farm livestock

Hendra Virus Information and Practice Policy overview June 2015

Hendra Virus (HeV) is often a fatal horse and human disease spread by flying foxes, which infects horses, and subsequently, infected horses infect humans.

The signs of Hendra Virus infection in horses are not consistent. Horses may first present as mildly off colour and then may show any or all of the following signs

- Depression
- Colic
- Respiratory disease
- Neurological disease
- Lameness

Because these signs are so non-diagnostic, it is impossible for us as veterinarians to rule out Hendra Virus infection in an unvaccinated horse, without an exclusion test, which involves blood and swabs being sent to the Biosecurity Qld laboratory in Brisbane. The earliest we receive results is 24 hours later and it may be up to 72 hours if a horse falls sick on a weekend.

If you call our practice to attend a sick unvaccinated horse, at this point in time, we will attend the horse and in most instances will need to wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to give the best treatments we can, and to take Hendra Virus exclusion samples to be dispatched to the laboratory. Some diagnostic and treatment options will not be available under these circumstances. We will instruct you not to have contact with the horse and to isolate the horse from other horses and pets until the results of the Hendra exclusion test are reported. If medication is required to be ongoing, we must return to administer this wearing PPE until the results are received. This can be a VERY EXPENSIVE PROCESS. This is also a very stressful time for veterinarians, horse owners and horses, as we may not be able to provide optimal therapy during this period. Horses are not able to be hospitalised during this time. The need to rule out Hendra Virus infection is as much about protecting horse owners as it is about protecting veterinarians, and we are obliged to do so.

The ONLY way to circumvent this process is to vaccinate your horse(s). As independent veterinarians, we have assessed the relevant research into the HeV vaccine and based on this research, clinical trials, and our own personal experience with the vaccine, we recommend the vaccine as a safe and effective prevention of HeV in horses, and therefore people who are in contact with them. We recommend the vaccine to be given to all horses over 4 months old, providing they are healthy. We also recommend breeding mares (pregnant or not) and stallions be vaccinated against HeV.

Horse owners or employers who employ staff to work with horses have an obligation to protect their staff from HeV infection. Vaccination of horses is considered the best method of providing this protection. Employers should be aware



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of their obligations under Workplace Health and Safety Qld legislation and should have suitable policies and procedures (including PPE) in place to protect staff if one or more horses in their care are unvaccinated.

Recently, a neighboring practice to us released a policy that they will no longer be attending sick unvaccinated horses. I respect the decision of that practice to enact this policy, and announce that Cooroora Veterinary Clinic will not take any new clients in that practice area unless their horses have current HeV vaccination status, or begin vaccination against HeV.

We also announce that as of September 1st 2015, no dental procedures will be performed on any unvaccinated horses in addition to our existing policy that no horses can be admitted to our clinic or breeding facility unless they have current HeV vaccination status. Horses who have received the 2 priming doses and the 6 month booster will be considered by our practice to be current if they have received a fourth or subsequent dose within 12 months of the previous dose.

On a personal note, I hope you can respect my desire to protect my staff, our patients, their owners and myself against this disease. This document has been produced to ensure our clients understand our position so that hopefully some of the animosity unjustly directed at our profession over this matter can be alleviated.

For supporting documentation please read www.health.qld.gov.au/ph/documents/cdb/hev-inf-prev-adv.pdf

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