

CHIEF VETERINARY OFFICER BULLETIN – 07 October 2021

Variant Hendra virus detection in NSW horse

A Hendra virus variant case has been confirmed near Newcastle

Summary:

A novel variant Hendra virus has been confirmed in a 7-year-old unvaccinated Clydesdale horse from West Wallsend, near Newcastle.

The detection of the virus was confirmed by PCR (polymerase chain reaction) testing at NSW Department of Primary Industries' Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute laboratory on Wednesday, 6 October 2021.

The positive test results were confirmed at the Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness on Thursday, 7 October 2021.

NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) has routinely tested all Hendra submissions over the past 6 months for the Hendra variant strain following a retrospective detection by researchers in a Queensland horse. This is the first detection of the variant strain in NSW.

While research on the variant strain is currently underway to establish whether it behaves similarly to Hendra virus, NSW DPI and partner agencies are taking a precautionary approach.

Background:

A private vet attended the property on Tuesday, 5 October 2021 in response to a call with the horse showing severe neurological signs before collapsing and being euthanised. The vet collected samples and were sent overnight to EMAI.

A District Veterinarian from Hunter Local Land Services has issued an Individual Biosecurity Direction to control the movement of animals and people on and off the property for 21 days.

None of the five other horses on the property are showing any signs of ill health. Their health status will be monitored daily.

Public Health Officers from NSW health are undertaking risk assessments of any people who have had contact with the infected horse.

Other information:

Hendra virus infection is notifiable in NSW under the NSW Biosecurity Act. Most cases in NSW have occurred on the north coast, with a case at Scone in 2019 being the most southern case previously. This is the first detection of the variant Hendra virus in NSW.

In NSW to date there have been 24 horse deaths as a result of Hendra virus on 23 properties since the first NSW case in 2006. There have been no human deaths from Hendra virus in NSW.

Vaccination of horses is the most effective way to help manage Hendra virus disease. Expert opinion suggests that the current vaccine is likely to provide immunity against the variant strain as well as the normal Hendra virus strain.

Other measures that horse owners and people that work closely with horses can put in place to reduce the risk of infection with Hendra virus and other henipaviruses, include:

- Feeding and stabling horses overnight
- Reduce flying fox and horse interaction by removing feed and water containers from under or near trees and removing horses or restricting their access to paddocks where flowering/fruited trees may be attracting flying foxes.
- Adopt sound hygiene and biosecurity measures as a routine practice for all horse contact including:
 - washing hands regularly and cover any cut/wound with a water-resistant dressing
 - using appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) when working with horses
 - cleaning and disinfecting equipment that has been in contact with horses' body fluids.

The signs of Hendra virus infection and its variant are very non-specific early on and if veterinarians require assistance then

- call the Emergency Animal Disease Hotline on 1800 675 888 or
- your Local Land Services district veterinarian or
- find further information on the [NSW DPI Hendra](#) webpage.

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