



# Information for horse owners

## What to do while waiting for Hendra virus test results

If your veterinarian wants to ensure your horse doesn't have Hendra virus (HeV), they will take samples to send for testing.

Initial HeV test results from sick horses are usually available 2–3 days after the laboratory receives the samples from your veterinarian.

### Transmission

Flying foxes are the natural reservoir of HeV. The mode of HeV transmission between flying foxes, and 'spillover' from flying foxes to horses, is not yet fully understood and research is continuing.

There is no evidence of human-to-human, human-to-horse or flying fox-to-human transmission of HeV.

HeV has not proven to be highly contagious; however, humans have been infected with the virus. All cases of human infection had exposure either during autopsy of infected horses or from close contact with infected horses.

### Reduce your risk

Dealing with HeV involves important public health and workplace health and safety issues and requires careful management.

Below are the steps you should take while waiting for test results:

- Avoid close contact with the horse under investigation and other horses that have been in contact with it. Wait until your veterinarian has advised you of the test results.

- Isolate the horse that is under investigation from other animals if it is safe to do so. Ideally, leave the suspect horse where it is and relocate other animals.
- If you must have close contact with a horse under investigation, take the following precautions:
  - ⇒ Cover cuts and abrasions with a water-resistant dressing.
  - ⇒ Use personal protective equipment (PPE) overalls, rubber boots, disposable gloves to protect your skin.
  - ⇒ Wear a P2 mask (particulate respirator) and safety glasses to protect your face from potential contact with the horse's body fluids (blood, saliva, urine, nasal secretions).
  - ⇒ Remove and dispose of PPE carefully, making sure you do not contaminate yourself.
  - ⇒ Always practise good hand hygiene.
- If you need to provide feed and water for horse/s, it is best to do this from a distance.
- Observe horses from a distance and notify your veterinarian immediately of any change in the health status of any horses.

Your veterinarian can help you obtain, correctly put on, remove and dispose of PPE. It is important to fit P2 masks correctly to ensure they are protective.



## Voluntary movement restrictions

While waiting for laboratory results you will be asked to take some voluntary actions to manage the immediate situation. These will include:

- Stop the movement of horses on and off the property,
- Stop the movement of horse products (manure) and equipment (tack, dental equipment) off the property, and
- Visiting horse practitioners (such as farriers) should be rescheduled to return at a later time.

Where movements of horses, equipment and people can not be totally stopped, phone Biosecurity SA to discuss how best to manage the situation.

## Test results

If the test result is **negative**, it means that the test has not detected HeV in the sample.

Your veterinarian may wish to take further samples to investigate your horse's illness.

You should continue to monitor your horse and notify your veterinarian immediately of any change in the health status of any horses.

If the test result is **positive**, Biosecurity SA will work with you and your veterinarian to manage the situation.

## Quarantine

The property where a horse with a positive HeV result is located will be placed under quarantine by Biosecurity SA. As part of the quarantine, the following procedures are likely to occur:

- All horses on the property will be monitored and tested for HeV.
- Any horses that have moved off the property in the last few weeks will be traced and tested for HeV.

- Testing and monitoring may be carried out and movement restrictions placed on neighbouring properties that have horses, depending on the assessed level of risk for HeV.
- It is the horse owner's responsibility to meet the general husbandry needs of their horses during the quarantine, including any non-HeV illnesses or injuries; and
- Other animals on the property may be tested for HeV, including pets.

Once there is substantial evidence that no other animals have been infected with HeV, the quarantine on your property will be lifted.

The national policy for all horses confirmed by laboratory testing to be positive for HeV is for them to be humanely destroyed to prevent the possibility of further spread of HeV to humans and other animals.

## Human exposure concerns

Biosecurity SA will contact SA Health (Communicable Disease Control Branch) whenever HeV is confirmed or suspected and there is a risk of human exposure to the virus.

SA Health will work with people to decide whether anyone requires monitoring and/or medical assistance.

People concerned about exposure to HeV should seek medical advice and contact their local General Practitioner or the Communicable Disease Control Branch of SA Health on 1300 232 272 (24 hours/ 7 days).

## Biosecurity SA contact details

Head Office: Glenside 08 8207 7900  
Emergency Animal Disease Hotline (24/7)  
1800 675 888

Information contained in this fact sheet has been sourced from the *Hendra Virus - veterinary practice manual* (May 2010) by the kind permission of the State of Queensland, Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation (Biosecurity Queensland).