

South East Country Vets



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HENDRA VIRUS & VACCINATION POLICY

Hendra virus is a fatal disease in both horses and humans. If the virus is contracted, the mortality rate to date is 100% in horses and 60% in humans. There is no cure for an animal or human infected with Hendra virus, so prevention is the only option. The area we cover is a large portion of the Hendra zone with many cases within 100km radius of our clinic. This means that Hendra virus is always a consideration when attending unwell, unvaccinated horses within our region.

A horse with Hendra virus can show a wide variety of signs, including but not limited to; neurological signs, respiratory signs, signs similar to colic or simply being vaguely unwell. These signs can be readily mistaken for true colic, snake-bite, choke or just general vague ill-health. It is not possible to diagnose Hendra virus on clinical signs alone therefore an exclusion test from Biosecurity Queensland in Brisbane is required. In recent Hendra virus cases there has been no known direct contact between horses and bats so it can be accurately presumed that any fly over or passing activity is enough to spread the disease.

A safe and effective Hendra virus vaccination is available to all horse owners. With over 800,000 doses given across Australia, the complication rates are very low (0.28%) and most consist of local injection site swelling and/or passing listlessness. At our clinics we have now administered over 9000 injections with 20 reported site reactions (swelling and heat at injection site) and one young horse in poor body condition score becoming listless for a two week period. All site reactions subsided within 3 days with no further consequences.

We strongly recommend that all horses are vaccinated as it is the best way of preventing Hendra virus infection in horses and people. The choice to vaccinate is that of the horse owner, however there are important consequences of not vaccinating to consider.

- There is a known risk of serious injury and/or death to both horses and humans who contract Hendra virus.
- Any horse that is unwell and not vaccinated must be considered at risk of having Hendra virus.

South East Country Vets feel a strong obligation to reduce pain and suffering of any horse, however we also have the responsibility of always protecting our staff and clients. Aside from our own personal safety, we want to ensure the protection of you and your family.

Government guidelines for workplace health and safety strongly document procedures that must be adhered to closely, to avoid placing staff at risk. The consequences are severe for veterinarians, nurses, and veterinary businesses that don't adhere to these guidelines. There are numerous, lengthy and emotional court cases still prevailing for those clinics that did not wholly comply with these recommendations in the past.

Current advice from the Australian Veterinary Association is that because there is a vaccine available, insurance policies will often not protect you as a horse owner from legal prosecution should a person or horse contract Hendra virus from a horse you own, or if your property must be quarantined. Additionally, WHS advise any owners using horses within their business are liable if one of their horses is diagnosed with Hendra virus as they have chosen not to vaccinate.

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South East Country Vets use the following guidelines when attending unwell horses that are not Hendra vaccinated:

- We will not refuse to attend to an unwell horse unless the veterinarian feels that the horse has a risk of having Hendra virus and the owner is unwilling to allow us to perform a Hendra exclusion test, despite the recommendation to do so.
- The veterinarian in attendance will conduct a risk assessment of the unwell horse and its environment to decide if a Hendra exclusion test is required.
- We will not undertake invasive procedures (e.g. stomach tube) on unvaccinated horses that are deemed at risk based on our assessment, until the results of the exclusion test are returned negative.
- The turnaround for the Hendra exclusion test can be anywhere from one to five days. The cost of the testing to the client is nil, however the cost to transport the samples to the lab will be covered by the client. As results are often needed urgently this is an overnight express charge.
- The veterinarian in attendance will use full Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and may request that any person assisting them will also wear full PPE as per workplace health and safety guidelines. The cost of this equipment and additional time taken to collect samples will be covered by the client.
- We understand that this delay in treatment may mean that a horse's condition can regrettably deteriorate rapidly. Minimal treatment (e.g. anti-inflammatories and pain relief) may be given at the time of exclusion testing. It should be noted specialist equine veterinary hospitals in our area will not accept unvaccinated horses for invasive treatment (e.g. colic surgery).

Routine procedures such as dentistry, lameness work ups and breeding examinations will continue to be carried out on healthy unvaccinated horses unless the veterinarian deems their condition to be at risk.

Horses that are currently up to date with Hendra vaccinations will be examined as per normal and appropriate care given in consultation with the client.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

How often do I need to vaccinate? (dosing protocol below)



What are the costs associated with vaccinating?

The cost of Hendra vaccination is usually similar to the cost of a shoeing, and your horse only needs a booster once a year after the initial course.

First vaccination + microchip = \$192.60 (discounts apply for >3 horses)

Booster vaccinations \$122.00 each (discounts apply for > 10 horses)
(excluding travel)

What are the costs associated with Hendra exclusion testing?

Consult, PPE and overnight biological substance postage = \$700-\$950+
(excluding travel, note - price varies based on consult during hours vs afterhours)

Vaccinating your horse against Hendra Virus not only protects you, your family and those who come in contact with your horse, but it will also give you the peace of mind that in the event your horse becomes unwell, we'll be able to provide them with the prompt treatment they require.