

What to do while waiting for Hendra virus test results

If your veterinarian considers your horse may have Hendra virus, they will take appropriate samples to send for testing.

Initial Hendra virus test results from sick horses are usually available 1–2 days after the laboratory receives the samples from your veterinarian.

Transmission

Flying foxes are a natural reservoir of Hendra virus. The exact route of transmission from flying foxes to horses is not yet fully understood and research is continuing.

Transmission of the virus between horses that have close contact can occur. There is no evidence that Hendra virus can be transmitted directly from flying foxes to humans or humans to horses. To date, human-to-human transmission has not occurred.

Hendra virus is not highly contagious; however, humans have been infected following high-level exposure to respiratory secretions (e.g. mucus) and/or blood and other body fluids from an infected horse.

Reduce your risk

Dealing with Hendra virus 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:

- Isolate the sick or dead horse from all people, other horses and other domestic animals (including dogs and cats) and from public access.



- Avoid close contact with the horse under investigation and other animals (including horses, dogs, cats) that have been in contact with it. Wait until your veterinarian has advised you of the test results.
- Advise other people to avoid close contact with these animals. This may include neighbours, farriers or other family members. It is the responsibility of the horse owner or person in charge of the horse to prevent, as best as possible, people from having incidental close contact with a horse suspected of being infected with Hendra virus.
- If the horse dies or is euthanased, advise the disposal contractor that the horse has been tested for Hendra virus.

- 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, P2 mask (particulate respirator) and safety eyewear to protect from potential contact with the horse's body fluids.
 - After handling the horse, remove and dispose of PPE carefully, making sure there is no contact with your facial area, particularly your eyes, mouth and nose.
 - Immediately wash your hands with soap and water and dry them or use hand wipes and waterless hand hygiene solution (alcohol-based hand rub).
- Observe horses from a distance and notify your veterinarian immediately of any change in the health status of any horses.

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) has produced an online video, *Suit Up*, regarding appropriate PPE for investigation of a horse suspected of being infected with Hendra virus. The video can be found on the AVA website at www.ava.com.au.

Test results

If the test result is **negative**, it means that the test has not detected the virus and/or antibodies 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 if you have concerns regarding the health status of any horses.

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

The property where a horse has been confirmed to be infected with Hendra virus will be placed under quarantine by Biosecurity Queensland. As part of the quarantine, the following procedures are likely to occur:

- Horses and other animals such as dogs and cats that have been assessed by Biosecurity Queensland as having potential for close contact with the virus will be monitored and tested.
- Any horses that have moved off the property in the last few weeks will be traced and may require monitoring and testing.
- Testing and monitoring may be carried out and movement restrictions placed on animals on neighbouring properties, depending on the assessed level of risk
- Animals being tested and monitored will be segregated from other susceptible animals. People can only have close contact with these animals if they are taking appropriate measures including personal protective equipment.
- It is the owner's responsibility to meet the general husbandry needs of their animals during the quarantine, including any non-Hendra virus illnesses or injuries.

Once there is substantial evidence that no other animals have been infected with Hendra virus, the quarantine will be lifted.

Human exposure concerns

If you have handled a sick horse where Hendra virus could be involved, follow these steps:

- Wash off any contamination with soap and water
- Shower and wash your hair
- Change your clothes and footwear

If you have health concerns at any time, seek medical advice.

Biosecurity Queensland will contact Queensland Health and Workplace Health and Safety Queensland whenever Hendra virus is confirmed or strongly suspected and there is a risk of human exposure to the virus.

Queensland Health will assess whether anyone requires monitoring and/or medical assistance.

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland may also contact people associated with a property where Hendra virus infection has been confirmed to assist with their enquiries.

Hendra virus vaccine

A Hendra virus vaccine for horses is now available for use. Vaccination is the single most effective way of reducing the risk of Hendra virus infection in horses.

Vaccinating horses can provide a public health and workplace health and safety benefit. Vaccination of horses is strongly encouraged and you should discuss this with your veterinarian.

For more information about the vaccine, visit www.health4horses.com.au

More information

More information about Hendra virus can be found at www.biosecurity.qld.gov.au

Notify suspected Hendra virus cases by contacting Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23 (business hours) or the Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline on 1800 675 888 (24 hour hotline).

Contact your GP, local Queensland Health Emergency Department or local Public Health Unit if you have concerns about possible exposure of people to a horse with confirmed Hendra virus infection.

For general enquiries about Hendra virus infection in humans, call the Queensland Health Hotline on 13HEALTH (13 43 25 84) or visit www.health.qld.gov.au

For information about managing Hendra virus risks at workplaces, contact Workplace Health and Safety Queensland on 1300 369 915 or visit www.worksafe.qld.gov.au

