



**Hendra Virus
Notice to Industry
New Hendra Variant Strain Near Newcastle**

8 October 2021

NSW DPI have advised that a 7-year-old unvaccinated Clydesdale gelding has been diagnosed as positive for a novel Hendra virus-variant in West Wallsend near Newcastle. The case was identified 5 October 2021 and confirmed by the Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness Thursday 7 October 2021.

Participants are advised that this is the furthest south that a positive case has been confirmed in an area where grey headed flying foxes are known to be present. Whilst the current case is not been considered a risk to the thoroughbred racing industry all participants are reminded that the signs and symptoms of Hendra can be vague and variable and the greatest of care should be always taken to monitor horses for symptoms. All necessary precautions to ensure the thoroughbred horse population is protected should be taken by participants.

The below information is supplied to participants to ensure they understand the signs of the Hendra virus and take all proper precautions to reduce the risk the Hendra virus impacting upon the thoroughbred racing industry.

Racing NSW General Manager – Veterinary Services Dr. Toby Koenig can be contacted at tkoenig@racingnsw.com.au or 0419 921579 if there is need for clarification or for any relevant enquiries.

**Marc Van Gestel
Chairman of Stewards
General Manager-Integrity
Racing NSW**

Important reminder to participants concerning Hendra virus infection

Hendra virus infection

Industry participants are reminded to be vigilant about the Hendra virus and the need for preventative measures to minimise the risk of infection of horses, humans and companion animals.

Hendra virus infection is a disease of horses and humans that can cause a serious and life-threatening illness. The natural hosts of Hendra virus are fruit bats (flying foxes) which can then pass the virus onto horses. Human infection results from close contact with the blood, body fluids and tissues of infected horses. There is no evidence to date of human-to-human or bat-to-human spread of Hendra virus, however, there is evidence of horse-to-horse infection due to contact with the secretions of sick horses.

Hendra virus infection of horses is characterised by the rapid onset of illness, with increased temperature, increased heart rate, discomfort or weight shifting between legs, depression, respiratory and neurological signs. Not all of these signs will be found in any one infected horse.

As the clinical signs of infection are quite non-specific and cases can be highly variable, it is important that participants are always vigilant.

Key signs in horses:

- acute onset of illness
- increased body temperature
- increased heart rate
- discomfort/ weight shifting between legs
- depression and/or erratic behaviour
- rapid deterioration of clinical signs

Other respiratory signs:

- respiratory distress—increased respiratory rate and effort
- terminal nasal discharge—can be initially clear, watery discharge progressing to stable white froth and/or stable blood-stained froth

Other neurological signs:

- 'Wobbly gait' progressing to loss of control of muscle movement
- altered consciousness—apparent loss of vision in one or both eyes, aimless walking in a dazed state
- head tilting, circling
- muscle twitching
- urinary incontinence
- lying down with inability to get up
- terminal weakness, loss of control of muscle movement and collapse

Protection of horses

The risk of Hendra virus infection in horses is higher in those situations where horses are kept outdoors in areas where flying foxes are known to inhabit. Flying foxes often visit properties where native eucalypts, bottlebrushes, lilli-pillies, figs and melaleucas are flowering. Blossoms are their primary source of food. They will also feed on palm seeds and exotic fruits when native food is less abundant.

Participants should follow these steps to protect their horses:

- Place feed and water containers under cover if possible
- Do not place feed and water containers under trees, particularly if flying foxes are attracted to those trees.
- Do not use feed that might be attractive to flying foxes if they are known to be in the area. Fruit and vegetables (e.g., apples, carrots) or anything sweet (e.g., molasses) may attract flying foxes.
- If possible, remove horses from paddocks where flowering or fruiting trees have resulted in a temporary surge in flying fox numbers. Return the horses after the trees have stopped flowering or fruiting.
- If removal of horses from paddocks is not possible, restrict their access to the areas where the flying foxes are active and for the period of time they are present (e.g., by fencing off trees where the animals roost or where they gather while flowers and fruit are present).
- Vaccination of horses should be considered, particularly in those parts of the state considered high risk or where cases have previously been diagnosed.
- 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.

Racehorses returning from spelling properties

Horses returning to a racing stable from a spelling property, particularly any located in coastal northern NSW or Queensland, potentially pose a greater Hendra infection risk than horses already in the stable. Participants should ascertain the level of risk of Hendra virus infection at the spelling properties from which their horses are returning to their racing stable and check their vaccination status.

As a precaution, horses arriving at a racing stable from a spelling property, particularly those in coastal northern NSW and Queensland, and from racing stables in northern coastal NSW and Queensland after the Brisbane, Grafton and Coffs Harbour carnivals, for example, should undergo a period of isolation in the stable, where they can be kept physically separate from the other horses for at least 2 weeks after arrival. During this time, a high level of basic hygiene should be practised by stable staff handling these horses. Also, these horses should be

closely monitored for any signs of illness or behavioural change, including at least daily temperature checks. It is important that staff be alert to any deviation from normal behaviour and demeanour in these new arrivals.

This is, of course, in addition to good biosecurity practice of monitoring closely all horses in a racing stable, including the taking of the temperature of each horse daily before the horse goes on to the training track or travels to the racetrack for competition.

Under no circumstances should a horse with an elevated temperature or showing signs of illness be permitted to go on the training track or to travel to a racetrack for the purpose of trialling or competition.

Participants are reminded of Australian Rule of Racing 64K and the requirement to notify the Stewards if a notifiable disease such as Hendra virus infection is suspected in a training establishment.

Safety precautions as Hendra virus can be fatal to humans

Human infection is thought to occur through contact with the body fluids and excretions of infected horses.

Maintain a high level of routine stable hygiene, including covering any cuts or abrasions on exposed skin before handling horses, for example by using disposable gloves, and washing hands well with soap and water, especially after handling your horse's mouth or nose (eg fitting or removing a bridle) and before eating, smoking or touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

The risk of human infection can be greatly reduced by adopting good hygiene practices as a matter of routine and taking increased precautions around any sick horse.

It is important to minimise contact with any horse if it is unwell. Participants should contact their vet immediately if they notice health problems in their horses or suspect Hendra infection. As a precaution, people in close contact with horses that have Hendra-like signs should wear protective face masks, goggles and gloves and take care with personal disinfection.

It is an offence under the Rules of Racing to withhold veterinary care where it is deemed that it ought to be provided.

Vaccination

While there is no current policy in NSW requiring the compulsory vaccination of thoroughbred racehorses against Hendra virus, it is acknowledged that thoroughbreds may be vaccinated, particularly in susceptible areas of the state such as the north and mid north coast.

According to animal health authorities including the NSW DPI, vaccination is the single most effective way of reducing the risk of Hendra virus infection in horses and therefore human infection.

The Hendra virus vaccine is now fully registered with the APVMA and is available for administration by veterinarians. Primary immunisation involves two doses 3 to 6 weeks apart. A third dose 6 months after the second primary dose is required, with further boosters to be administered every 12 months after the third dose.

Summary of Dosing Schedule

Vaccination Type	Timing Interval
First Dose	Day 1
Second Dose	Day 21 - 42
Third Dose	6 months after the second dose
Followed by 12 monthly boosters	

Participants are reminded that a horse that has been vaccinated against Hendra virus is not permitted to start in any race for five clear days from the day of the dose of vaccine. Further, trainers must ensure that a record of the Hendra virus vaccination is included in the trainer's record of treatment for such horse in accordance with the requirements of AR178(F)(1).

Further information and resources on Hendra virus are available at the NSW DPI website at:

<https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/animals-and-livestock/horses/health-and-disease/hendra-virus/hendra>

To report suspicions of Hendra virus infection, contact your vet or ring the emergency animal disease hotline on 1800 675 888. Racing NSW Stewards should also be contacted on 02 9551 7500.