

## FACT SHEET

# Hendra virus – risk to workers

Hendra is a virus that is carried by flying foxes (bats), which causes a serious – sometimes fatal – illness in horses. Although such transmission is uncommon, there have been cases of humans contracting the virus and dying from it after they've been in contact with an infected horse. There is no evidence of bat-to-human, human-to-human or human-to-horse spread of Hendra virus.

People who work around horses should exercise caution, especially if the Hendra virus has been identified in their local area.

So far, most reported cases of the virus have come from Queensland. However, three confirmed cases were recently reported in northern NSW.

### Your responsibility

As an employer, you must, as far as is reasonably practicable, control any potential risk to your workers, including any risks that may arise when they work with or in close proximity to horses.

### What you can do

Horses can carry the Hendra virus for about three days before they show any symptoms. Workers who have regular contact with horses should protect themselves by routinely using good hygiene practices. This involves following the recommendations below:

- Always cover any cuts or abrasions on exposed skin before handling a horse. Always wash your hands with soap and water, particularly after handling a horse's mouth or nose. Remember that every time you put a bridle on or take it off, you're likely to touch the horse's saliva.
- Avoid contact with a horse's blood and its other body fluids – especially respiratory and nasal secretions, such as saliva and urine – as well as its body tissue. Ideally, you should avoid all contact with suspect horses until a veterinarian has investigated and provided advice on their safe handling.
- Anyone who handles or investigates a horse that is thought to be infected should wear full protective clothing. The minimum standard for this is impervious overalls, a pair of boots and gloves, a respirator mask and eye protection.
- If a horse in your workplace is thought to have contracted the virus, you must advise your local veterinarian immediately, who will contact the NSW Department of Primary Industries.
- Any worker who is concerned about their suspected exposure to the Hendra virus should seek medical advice immediately.

### Further information

- Read the 'Hendra Virus' page at the NSW Health website – <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/publichealth/infectious/hendra.asp>
- Call WorkCover on **13 10 50** or visit [workcover.nsw.gov.au](http://workcover.nsw.gov.au)

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Information on the latest laws can be checked by visiting the NSW legislation website ([www.legislation.nsw.gov.au](http://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au)).

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