

## Hendra Virus-Dispelling the facebook myths.

Hendra virus was first discovered in 1994 at a racing stable in Hendra, a suburb in Brisbane, Queensland.

Hendra Virus is carried by flying foxes, the virus is shed in the faeces. The virus is picked up by the horses from the faeces in feed or water troughs or by grazing in contaminated paddocks. The flying foxes do not show any symptoms of Hendra and so identifying those that carry the disease is not possible in the wild.

The virus can be passed between horses and to humans by coming into contact with the infected animals secretions. ie saliva, nasal discharge, urine, faeces, blood.

Since 1994:

- 73 horses have tested positive for Hendra Virus. 70% of those horses died as a result of the infection- those that recovered were euthanised.
- 7 people have contracted Hendra Virus. 4 of those people have died as a result of the virus. The three remaining people are no longer able to function as they were before they became ill and still suffer symptoms of their infection.
- One dog has been infected with hendra virus (can only be infected by an infected horse). The dog did not show clinical signs. He was euthanised due to the unknown risk of him spreading the disease to humans.
- Hendra virus in horses appears to be limited to Queensland and New South Wales. However Hendra has been isolated from flying foxes intermittently all over Australia.

### **Clinical signs of Hendra:**

- Respiratory distress
- Pneumonia
- Colic
- Lethargy
- Fever
- Nervous signs
- Normal- Some horses do not show clinical signs.

The only way to diagnose Hendra virus is to do a PCR on a blood sample. This can take up to two days and during this time your horse cannot be referred to an equine hospital for lifesaving treatment.

### **How can we prevent it?**

There is a vaccine which is 100% effective and 100% safe for your horse. No vaccinated horse has ever contracted Hendra. The vaccine must be administered by

a vet so that we can:

- Keep an accurate record of which horses are vaccinated.
- Keep an accurate record of any reactions to the vaccine ( Zoetis- the vaccine manufacturer lists all of the reported reactions, and you are allowed to ask for a copy.)

0.3 % of animals vaccinated with this vaccine will have a reaction- the most severe symptoms seen have resulted in swelling and neck pain, which resulted in the horse being unable to eat from the floor for two days.

Is not vaccinating worth the risk? For you? For your children?