



THE RIVERS EQUINE VETS

Hendra Policy for The Rivers Equine Vets (Updated June 2021)

Hendra virus (HeV) is a fatal disease in horses and people with a 100% mortality rate in horses (the virus causes the death of the horse or it is subjected to mandatory euthanasia if it tests positive) and 65% in people (4 of 7 human cases have been fatal). Vets and their staff are at risk from HeV and they account for all but one of the human fatalities.

There is a very large range and variation in clinical signs in horses with Hendra Virus making it a very difficult disease for vets to diagnose. Horses with HeV have been diagnosed with colic, snake bite, choke and generally being unwell. The rectal temperature can be high, low or normal. The only way to definitively diagnose HeV is by exclusion or confirmatory testing. Samples from horses suspected of having HeV need to be submitted to the NSW DPI lab in Sydney or the Queensland Biosecurity lab in Brisbane and, depending on the time submitted, results may take between 1 and 4 days.

The implications for veterinarians treating sick horses that are unvaccinated are extremely serious. Work Health and Safety requires that veterinarians are able to work in an environment that allows them to conduct their work safely. As such, The Rivers Equine Vets has therefore implemented a policy when dealing with sick or unwell horses in order to ensure the safety of their vets and staff.

Vaccination against HeV is considered pivotal in reducing the risk of horses contracting HeV and as a result reducing the risk of people contracting the disease. Vaccination is the single most effective way to reducing the risk of HeV virus. In all HeV cases in people, the virus has been transmitted from contact with an infected horse.

The practical consequences of not vaccinating your horse against HeV are many but there are several very important points to note:

1. There is a known and serious risk of injury or death because of the virus. Although the infection is not common, the consequences are very serious including death of horses and people. Hendra Virus is considered as a "BSL-4" virus (Bio-safety level 4 – the same as Ebola virus) and is considered by NAID and CDC to be category 3 bioterrorism agent or pathogen.
2. Any horse that is unwell must always be considered at risk of having HeV as the clinical signs are extremely variable. Work Health and Safety state that 'if Hendra virus can't be ruled out it must be ruled in'. The statement essentially means that exclusion tests must be taken to rule the virus in or out. Therefore any unvaccinated horses attended by The Rivers Equine Vets, where HeV is a differential, will only be done so with the use of appropriate PPE and no invasive diagnostic tests or treatments will be undertaken until such times as tests results are known. Given that this process may take up to 4 days this may seriously compromise the outcome of your horse's illness.



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The Rivers Equine Vets will apply the following guidelines for attending unvaccinated horses:

1. **Sick, unvaccinated horses** will incur an additional fee to cover the costs of personal protective equipment and the additional time of suiting up, decontaminating and administrative expenses of submitting samples.

2. **Sick, unvaccinated** horses presented for emergencies where Hendra Virus is considered a differential will require an exclusion test prior to any invasive or risk associated treatment being provided. Treatment will be limited to that deemed necessary for the animal's welfare and will not include invasive or diagnostic procedures or therapies.

3. **Sick, unvaccinated** horses will not be referred to a referral hospital until there is a negative exclusion test. Treatment will be limited to that deemed necessary for the animal's welfare and will not include invasive or diagnostic procedures or therapies.

The Rivers Equine Vets has an obligation to its staff and clients to protect and advise them on the best way of preventing diseases in horses and people. Vaccination is the best way of preventing Hendra virus in horses and people and we encourage all owners to vaccinate their horses against HeV. Murwillumbah and the Tweed Valley is a hot spot for the virus with 4 cases in this area in horses to date. Hendra vaccination is considered safe and effective. The complication rate is very low (<2% in our practice) with adverse reactions including swelling at the injection site, stiffness at the injection site, lethargy, inappetence and mild fever the most common clinical signs.

The Rivers Equine Vets encourages clients to vaccinate within the label recommendations of the manufacturer ie. every 12 months and that their horses have a "current" vaccination status on the Hendra Vaccine registry.

The Rivers Equine Vets cannot vouch for any other veterinarian or veterinary practice with regards to their particular HeV vaccination policy.

If you are unable to contact a veterinary surgeon from The Rivers Equine Vets and believe your horse may have Hendra virus please contact the Biosecurity Hotline on: 1800 675 888 (24 hour hotline).

Please contact your GP or local emergency department if you have concerns about possible exposure of people to a horse with confirmed Hendra virus infection.

This policy may change in the future to reflect the level of risk to our staff and also to fulfil Work Health and Safety obligations.