



Townsville Veterinary Clinic and North Queensland Specialist Equine Service policy on horses unvaccinated for Hendra Virus.

Hendra virus is a fatal disease of horses and humans. Since 1994 over 80 horses have died and 7 people have contracted Hendra virus, and unfortunately 4 of them have died as a result of Hendra virus infection. Hendra virus is classified as a Biosecurity Level 4 Virus (i.e. in the same category as Ebola virus) and as such it will always be considered a significant risk to occupational health and safety and business operations.

When Hendra virus first became known it primarily caused a pneumonia-like illness with high fevers, coughing and profuse frothy or bloody nasal discharge. In recent Hendra virus cases the disease has presented with no specific or consistent clinical signs making it difficult to distinguish from many other diseases of horses. Even more alarming we now know that infected horses may shed live virus in body fluids for a number of days prior to showing any obvious clinical signs of being unwell. In addition it appears that the incubation period is increasing. This means that the number of days between when the horse is infected to when it shows signs of disease has increased meaning the potential for inadvertent exposure of humans to Hendra virus exists even in an apparently healthy horse.

Over the past several years the emergence of Hendra virus infection in horses has caused a change in the way that horse owners and veterinarians approach and manage horses on a daily basis.

As veterinarians and business owners we have a responsibility and duty of care not only to the horses we examine and treat, but also their owners, to our staff, to ourselves and our families to take steps to mitigate the risk of exposure to this deadly disease.

Vaccination of horses for Hendra Virus is the only effective way of reducing risks to the community, our clients and colleagues.

From December 1st 2014, the Townsville Veterinary Clinic and North Queensland Specialist Equine Service are implementing the following Hendra virus / vaccination policy:

1. Sick horses and or Emergency cases will not be routinely admitted to the clinic without a current Hendra vaccination certificate.
2. Sick horses and or Emergency cases will require Hendra virus exclusion testing prior to any invasive or risk associated treatments. Based on a risk assessment, emergency symptomatic treatment may be provided while awaiting the results of the Hendra virus exclusion test (this may take 2-3 days as all testing is performed in Brisbane)
3. A new pricing structure will come into effect with a surcharge set to reflect the increased risk of unvaccinated sick horses and or emergency cases. Horses that are otherwise well and undergoing routine healthcare can have the surcharge waived if vaccination is undertaken at the time of examination. Hendra vaccinated horses will not be subject to any surcharge in line with the reduced risk associated with examining those horses.

Note: In conjunction with Zoetis (the Hendra vaccine manufacturers) we will be offering the second vaccine dose for free (does not include travel) for the months of October and November. This will apply to all horses being vaccinated for the first time.

Hendra vaccination is considered to be very safe and effective. Over 200,000 horses have now been vaccinated and the rate of complications is very low. Side effects following vaccination have been reported, including swelling at the vaccination site, fever and lethargy vaccination.

Townsville Veterinary Clinic and North Queensland Specialist Equine Service has an obligation to its clients, staff and the community to protect and advise them on the best way of preventing disease in horses and people. Vaccination is the best way of preventing Hendra virus infection in horses and therefore protecting the community and its clients.

HENDRA VACCINES are currently supplied and used under APVMA Permit 14876.