



VETERINARY SURGEONS BOARD OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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e-BULLETIN #15

Testing horses for Hendra virus and variant henipavirus in South Australia

The item below comes from the Chief Veterinary Officer of South Australia, Biosecurity SA, Department of Primary Industries and Regions (PIRSA). If you have any questions or concerns about the item, please contact PIRSA directly.

Researchers from the University of Sydney and the CSIRO have recently circulated, via the Australian Veterinary Association and Equine Veterinarians Australia, some information regarding a Hendra virus (HeV) variant (a henipavirus) that has been detected in a sample from a horse from south-eastern Queensland that was euthanised in 2015. The horse was suffering from clinical signs consistent with Hendra virus at the time it was euthanised, but it tested negative to Hendra virus. To ensure that all veterinary surgeons in South Australia (SA) are notified of these findings and aware of the Hendra virus testing protocols in SA, the Department of Primary Industries and Regions (PIRSA), via the Veterinary Surgeons Board of South Australia, are circulating the information from the researchers (see link) and some additional SA-specific information.

A very similar virus to this HeV variant has been detected in a small number of grey-headed flying foxes (GHFF) from SA and other states since 2013. This is the first detection of this virus in a species other than a flying fox.

In SA, any horse that presents with signs of illness that could be consistent with Hendra virus can access government-subsidised testing (through PIRSA) for Hendra virus. Samples submitted to the PIRSA through Gribbles VETLAB for Hendra virus exclusion are tested at the Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness (ACDP) in Geelong. **The diagnostic assays used at ACDP can detect this HeV variant, and all South Australian horses tested to date have been negative.**

The risk of Hendra virus in a horse in SA is the most significant for horses having travelled from the higher risk areas of Queensland and northern New South Wales in the previous 21 days before showing signs of illness. All cases of Hendra virus in horses, including this variant case, have been in Qld or northern NSW. Whilst the risk for Hendra virus in horses resident in South Australia remains low, this detection is a timely reminder that any horse suffering with clinical signs that could be consistent with Hendra virus should have samples submitted for Hendra virus exclusion, and appropriate personal protective equipment worn when managing the horse. PIRSA has always encouraged the testing of clinically consistent horses in SA to continue to



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monitor for any potential occurrence or change to the known distribution of Hendra cases.

All horse samples submitted to Gribbles VETLAB should have a thorough clinical history provided, regardless of whether there is any suspicion of Hendra virus. If the samples are from a clinically well horse, then those details must also be provided. All samples submitted to the laboratory from sick horses must also be accompanied by a Horse Submission Questionnaire.

If a horse presents with clinical signs consistent with Hendra virus, you can contact the Emergency Animal Disease Hotline on 1800 675 888 or your regional veterinary officer for further information on testing and management.

The details provided by the research group about the detection of this Hendra virus variant can be found here: [Update to veterinarians regarding Hendra virus](#)

More information about Hendra virus and appropriate sampling is available on the PIRSA website:

https://pir.sa.gov.au/biosecurity/animal_health/horses/hendra_virus

The Horse Submission Questionnaire is available here:

https://pir.sa.gov.au/biosecurity/animal_health/veterinarians/livestock_disease_surveillance

or within the Livestock Disease Surveillance Subsidy Guide

The media release from the Australian Veterinary Association is available here:

<https://www.vetvoice.com.au/media-releases/new-strain-of-deadly-hendra-virus-hev-discovered/>

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