

## **Hendra - To Vaccinate or Not to Vaccinate Information for Owners**

After receiving numerous inquiries regarding the Hendra vaccination it is apparent that many people are still questioning whether they should vaccinate against Hendra or not. Given the nature and history of this disease, we felt the need to provide our clients with this informative flyer.

### ***Common Questions We Get Asked***

- Will my horse die?
- What are the side effects?
- What are the symptoms?
- How often do I need to vaccinate?
- What are the costs?
- What is your Policy regarding Hendra?
- Should I or shouldn't I vaccinate?

### ***Will my Horse Die?***

Hendra is a deadly disease that can kill both horses and humans. The Hendra virus (HeV), has only ever been reported in Australia. It was first detected in southern Queensland in 1994, however, more recently it has been reported further south in NSW, including Scone and west of the Great Dividing Range. There is no cure for this deadly virus and vaccination is the most effective way to prevent the risk.

### ***What Are The Side Effects?***

We have vaccinated thousands of horses against Hendra and in our experience, we have seen no more than a sore neck or a slight temperature which lasted for 24 hours and was treated with bute. Symptoms which are also associated and consistent with other vaccines.

### ***What are the Symptoms?***

A key consideration is that an infected horse can shed Hendra virus before it shows any signs of illness. This means that there is a risk of apparently healthy horses infecting other horses or people with Hendra virus up to 3-5 days before the onset of illness.

Common Symptoms include;

- Acute onset of illness
- Increased body temperature
- Increased heart rate
- Depression
- Discomfort / weight shifting between legs
- Respiratory Signs
  - Rapid deterioration
  - Congestion and fluid on lungs
  - Difficulty breathing
  - Nasal discharge – initial clear then frothy white or blood stained
  - Weakness, loss of co-ordination and collapse
- Neurological Signs
  - Wobbly gait
  - Altered consciousness
  - Head tilting
  - Muscle twitching
  - Urinary incontinence

### ***How often do I need to vaccinate?***

After the initial vaccination, a 2<sup>nd</sup> injection is required at 3-6 weeks, followed by a booster at 6 months and then one injection annually. Horses must be microchipped and their details will be registered with Zoetis, (the makers of the Hendra vaccination and also the Tetanus and Strangles vaccines), so that you will receive an automated reminder via email when your horse is due for their vaccination.

### ***What are the Costs?***

The cost of Hendra vaccination is usually similar to the cost of a shoeing and your horse only needs a booster once a year after the initial course. Understanding that vaccinations can become quite costly, we are endeavouring to provide our clients with a cost effective vaccination scheme.

### ***Scone Case Aftermath***

We have seen a significant increase in vaccinations for our Thoroughbred clients following on from the recent case in Scone. We have been advised that most, if not all, of the studs in the Hunter Valley area will not be accepting breeding horses unless they have been vaccinated for the Hendra virus. These studs are considered high traffic areas for both horses and people and the strict guidelines now imposed, protect not only the horses but the staff, the owners and associates as well.

### ***Our Policy***

A copy of our Hendra Policy can be found on our website, however, please note that sick, unvaccinated horses from areas where Hendra is a potential threat or who are presenting with suspected Hendra-like symptoms, must have Hendra virus infection ruled out by the collection of blood and nasal, oral and rectal swabs by the attending veterinarian. Until results of Hendra virus exclusion testing are received, horses may receive sub-optimal therapy, and diagnostic procedures will be limited. This is in order to comply with the requirements of workplace health and safety laws, and to minimise the risk of transmission of the disease to people. Personal Protection Equipment will be worn and provided by the veterinarian to the horse handler and or owner at the time of the call at a minimum cost of \$150. Please note, this delay may result in extra costs and unnecessary distress to both horse and owner that could have been avoided by prior vaccination of these animals against Hendra virus.

### ***Should I or Shouldn't I Vaccinate?***

As we have stated, Hendra has deadly consequences. We believe that vaccination of horses is the most effective way to help manage Hendra virus for not just our horses but for yourselves as owners, our staff and both our families.

Should you require further information, we would be only too happy to discuss any question you may have.

Yours faithfully,

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