

Flying Fox Facts - Hendra Virus

From www.ehp.qld.gov.au

Flying foxes and Hendra virus

Hendra virus is an extremely rare virus which can cause disease in people and horses. Although the disease can be transmitted from horses to humans, there is no evidence that it can be transmitted directly from flying foxes to humans.

The virus was first isolated in 1994 from an outbreak of disease in horses at a stable in the suburb of Hendra, Brisbane. Since then it has been confirmed on twelve separate properties.

Since it was first isolated in 1994, seven cases of human infection have been recorded of which three have been fatal.

Flying foxes are a natural host for Hendra virus. The spread of Hendra virus from flying foxes to horses is not yet fully understood. However, the virus has been found in the urine, placental material, aborted foetuses and birthing fluids of flying foxes.

Ongoing research is continually increasing our knowledge about this disease.

Protection of people

There is no evidence of Hendra virus spreading directly from native animals such as flying foxes to people.

All human infections have been the result of very close contact with infected horses, in particular direct exposure to tissues and secretions from infected or dead horses.

People are urged to be extremely vigilant if their horse displays rapid onset of clinical signs including raised temperature, respiratory distress and/or neurological signs. In this case, horse owners should contact their local veterinarian for further advice.

Protection of horses

Flying foxes often visit properties where native eucalypts, bottlebrushes, lilly-pillies, figs and melaleucas are flowering.

Blossoms are their primary source of food. They will also feed on palm seeds and exotic fruits when native food is less abundant. Horse owners should follow these steps to protect their horses:

1. Do not place feed and water containers under trees, particularly if flying foxes are attracted to those trees.
2. Do not use feed that might be attractive to flying foxes if they are known to be in the area. Fruit and vegetables (e.g. apples, carrots) or anything sweet (e.g. molasses) may attract flying foxes.
3. If possible, remove horses from paddocks where flowering or fruiting trees have resulted in a temporary surge in flying fox numbers. Return the horses after the trees have stopped flowering or fruiting.
4. If removal of horses from paddocks is not possible, restrict their access to the areas where the flying foxes are active and for the period of time they are present (e.g. under trees while flowers and fruit are present)



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A map of flying fox camps in Queensland can be found on the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection website at <http://www.dehp.qld.gov.au>

Annual surveys are carried out to update the information, but people need to remember that many colonies move regularly and may be a long way from their feeding sites.

It is vitally important to follow good biosecurity and hygiene practices even if you do not know of flying fox colonies in the area.

Control of flying foxes

Any unauthorised attempts to disturb flying fox colonies would not only be illegal but also ineffective.

Flying foxes are very mobile animals. They are found in many areas of Queensland. They occupy daytime campsites which vary in location from rivers, creeks and streams to gullies and mangroves areas and some species regularly move camps, following food sources such as flowering trees. They fly many kilometres between the camps and their night-time feeding sites.

Landholders wanting to discourage flying foxes visiting their properties should plant less desirable tree species.

For further information

Biosecurity Queensland provides comprehensive advice to all people who have contact with horses on how to protect themselves from infection.

Full information is on the Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries website at www.daff.qld.gov.au.

For further information visit the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection website at <http://www.dehp.qld.gov.au> or call 1300 130 372

Notify suspected Hendra virus cases by contacting:

- QPIF on 13 25 23 (during business hours)
- the Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline on 1800 675 888 (24-hr hotline).

Contact the Queensland Health Hotline on 13 Health (432 584) if you have concerns about possible exposure of people to Hendra virus.



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