



Media Statement

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Reducing the risk of Hendra virus occurring in horses in WA

Horse owners in Western Australia are reminded of simple steps they can take to reduce the risk of Hendra virus occurring in their horses.

Department of Agriculture and Food acting chief veterinary officer Chris Hawkins said while Hendra virus has never occurred in Western Australia, there was a risk of it occurring where flying foxes and horses have contact.

“While the risk of Hendra virus occurring in WA is low, flying foxes north of Shark Bay have been shown to carry Hendra virus and horses in contact with them have some risk of becoming infected,” Dr Hawkins said.

“However, there are several steps owners can take to significantly reduce the risk of Hendra virus infection in their horses.

“The first step is to remove horses from paddocks with fruiting or flowering trees where flying foxes feed. Research has confirmed that the area directly below and around fruiting or flowering trees is where most of the flying foxes’ urine, faeces and fruit debris fall. These secretions pose a high risk to horses.

“Additionally, horse owners should place feed bins and water troughs under cover away from trees and not plant trees that attract flying foxes in or near horse paddocks.”

Dr Hawkins said the department did not require horses to be vaccinated against Hendra virus and there were no import restrictions on unvaccinated horses.

“However, vaccination is an option WA horse owners may wish to discuss with their veterinarian if their horses are likely to have contact with flying foxes or travel to Queensland or northern New South Wales or have contact with horses from Queensland or northern NSW at events,” he said.

“It is also important to remember that no vaccine is 100 per cent effective, so horse owners and veterinarians will need to remain vigilant with their biosecurity practices and for signs of Hendra virus in vaccinated horses.”

Dr Hawkins said horse owners should always report any signs suggestive of Hendra virus in their horses to their veterinarian.

“Signs such as laboured breathing, discharge from the nose, wobbly gait, lack of coordination and dullness should be reported, particularly if horses may have had exposure to flying foxes, had recently arrived from Queensland or northern NSW or had contact with horses from those areas at events,” he said.

“If a horse shows signs suspicious of Hendra virus, owners should immediately isolate the horse from people, other horses and animals and contact their veterinarian or the Emergency Animal Disease hotline on 1800 675 888.

“Owners should not have close contact with the horse until veterinary advice has been received.”

For more information about the risk of Hendra virus in WA, search on ‘Hendra’ at agric.wa.gov.au.

Information about the Hendra virus vaccine is available at health4horses.com.au.

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