

AUSVETPLAN

Draft revised Hendra virus response policy brief, version 4

Submission from the Australian Veterinary Association Ltd



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About us

The Australian Veterinary Association is the national organisation representing veterinarians in Australia. Our 9000 members come from all fields within the veterinary profession. Clinical practitioners work with companion animals, horses, farm animals, such as cattle and sheep, and wildlife. Government veterinarians work with our animal health, public health and quarantine systems while other members work in industry for pharmaceutical and other commercial enterprises. We have members who work in research and teaching in a range of scientific disciplines. Veterinary students are also members of the Association.

Executive summary

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) and Equine Veterinarians Australia (EVA) welcome the opportunity to provide input into the AUSVETPLAN draft Hendra virus response policy brief, version 4.

Overall we consider that this revised updated version is comprehensive and provides a great deal more detail on aspects of Hendra disease and its management, than the previous version 3.5¹.

However, we have concerns that the issue of **vaccination** as a preventative measure is under-emphasized in this new version 4, compared to the previous version.

The 2013 version 3.5, under “Disease Prevention” includes the following:

Vaccination can break the cycle of virus transmission from horses to humans, and provide a public health and workplace health and safety benefit. As well as adopting good personal hygiene and biosecurity practices, and using PPE appropriate to the situation when dealing with horses, workplace health and safety planning should consider the public health benefit of horse vaccination. Widespread uptake of the horse vaccine has the potential to significantly reduce the risk of human exposure.

In contrast the 2016 draft version 4, under “Disease Prevention” states:

Although the vaccine is an important breakthrough in the options for preventing HeV infection, no vaccine is 100% effective. It is important that people in contact with horses continue to practise good biosecurity and infection control at all times, even with vaccinated horses.

Notwithstanding that this is a document primarily focused on response to disease outbreaks, we nevertheless feel it is essential to send as strong a message as possible about prevention through vaccination, owing to the catastrophic impacts of this disease when it does occur. To that end, we feel vaccination should be much more strongly emphasized as the best preventative measure currently available to us, in this new draft policy.

AVA and EVA also request that vaccination be mentioned in the **Policy Summary** (section 5.3), because currently it does not appear at all in this part. There is a risk that people who only peruse the summary without reading the entire document will fail to appreciate the important role of vaccination in Hendra prevention.

There have been recent positive changes including the formal approval of yearly boosters for the Hendra vaccine, and a corresponding increase in acceptance of the vaccine by equine groups. We feel that strengthening the wording around the benefits of vaccination in the new policy is therefore entirely appropriate.

Recommendations

1. **Section 4.5.4, Disease Prevention:** we recommend the wording about vaccination be strengthened to emphasise that widespread uptake of the vaccine is the single most important measure to reduce the incidence of Hendra infection. We commend to you the following wording taken from the Queensland Government's 2014 "Hendra virus infection prevention advice"² which states:

The vaccine is the single most effective way of reducing the risk of Hendra virus infection in horses and provides a work health and safety and public health benefit by the vaccine's ability to not only protect horses from infection but also to break the cycle of virus transmission from horses to humans. Widespread uptake of the horse vaccine has the potential to significantly reduce the number and risk of human exposures.

We have made suggested changes to this section as marked-up text in the attached Word version of the draft, for your consideration.

2. **Section 5.3, Summary of Policy:** we would like to see vaccination included in the summary. Specifically, we recommend that an additional dot point be listed (first) under "Supporting measures include" as follows:

Supporting measures include:

- ***Vaccination of horses as the single most effective way to reduce the risk of Hendra virus infection and the highest order of risk management currently available***
 - *Preventing susceptible terrestrial species (horses) on the property from sheltering under trees attractive to flying foxes, to limit the potential for further virus exposures on the premises*
 - *Continued practising of appropriate biosecurity precautions by all animal owners after quarantine and movement controls have been rescinded.*
3. AVA and EVA also offer additional recommendations for minor text corrections and accuracy on other general issues in the attached, marked-up version of the draft revised policy, for your consideration.

References

1. AUSVETPLAN Response policy brief Hendra virus infection, Version 3.5, 2013
2. QLD Government. Hendra virus infection prevention advice, 2014:
<https://www.health.qld.gov.au/ph/documents/cdb/hev-inf-prev-adv.pdf>

Attachments

- A. AUSVETPLAN draft Hendra virus response policy brief, version 4, including tracked changes