

Flying foxes, horses and Hendra



Flying foxes are a natural host for Hendra virus, which occasionally spills over from the flying fox population into horses.

The resulting infection can cause the death of the horse. The infections are rare, which indicates that transmissions may only occur under very specific and extreme conditions.

Hendra can be transmitted from flying fox to horse, horse to horse, and horse to human. There is no evidence that the virus can be transmitted from flying fox to human, or human to horse, or human to human. There is also no evidence that the virus is airborne.

The exact route of transmission of Hendra virus from flying foxes to horses is not yet fully understood. However, the virus has been detected in the blood, urine, faeces, placental material, aborted fetuses and birthing fluids of flying foxes.

Protect yourself and your horse

As a precautionary measure, horse owners should not feed or water horses beneath trees where flying foxes roost or visit regularly. Cover feed and water containers to minimise opportunities for contamination.

Regularly inspect paddocks to identify flowering or fruiting vegetation which could attract foraging flying foxes and relocate or temporarily exclude horses from grazing in that area.

Owners should also consider stabling horses before dusk and overnight when flying foxes are most active.

If horse owners know there are bats in the area, they should contact their veterinarian immediately if any of their horses become ill with fever, respiratory problems, colic or neurological signs (like loss of vision, loss of balance). You should also contact Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23 or the Emergency Disease Watch Hotline on 1800 675 888.

Until the horse is examined and cleared by a veterinarian, horse owners should limit contact with sick horses and avoid contact with any body fluid, including nasal discharge. If horse owners are concerned about their own health, they should contact their doctor or their local public health unit immediately.

For more information head to:

- Department of Agriculture and Fisheries www.daf.qld.gov.au
- Department of Environment and Heritage Protection www.ehp.qld.gov.au
- Queensland Health www.health.qld.gov.au

