

History of the Hendra Virus

In September 1994, a prominent Queensland horse trainer, his stablehand and many of his horses fell ill to a sudden and mysterious illness. This catastrophic event culminated in the deaths of the trainer and 14 of his horses.

The former Queensland Department of Primary Industries (QDPI), now Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, collected specimens from the affected racehorses and submitted them for testing at the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO). The CSIRO isolated and identified what proved to be a new virus that had not been reported anywhere else in the world. Researchers named the virus 'Hendra' after the suburb where the first human fatality was reported.

It was a further twelve months before another human fatality appeared. A farmer from Mackay in North Queensland died 13 months after being exposed to the virus in August 1994 while performing a post-mortem on two horses. These horses were later identified as the earliest known equine cases of the deadly Hendra virus.

Further scientific research revealed flying foxes as the natural 'hosts' of the virus and that it is transmitted to horses through contact with flying fox body fluids and excretions.

Between 1995 and 2007 Biosecurity Queensland reported seven cases of Hendra virus infection in horses, however it wasn't until 2008 that another significant outbreak occurred. In June 2008, the virus claimed the lives of eight horses and a third person when an outbreak struck a Redlands veterinary clinic.

It was another twelve months before a Hendra spillover event near Rockhampton took the life of a fourth human victim and four horses.

In 2009, researchers from the CSIRO in collaboration with US scientists at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences demonstrated the potential for human monoclonal antibodies to provide protection against both the Nipah and Hendra virus. These antibodies have since been used for compassionate use in three suspected human Hendra virus cases.

In May 2011, CSIRO announced that a vaccine had been successfully developed and could protect horses from contracting the lethal Hendra virus.

In that same year, 18 outbreaks and 24 equine cases were reported, the highest number ever recorded in a twelve-month period. Of these 18 outbreaks, eight were identified in NSW, making it the second year that the virus had appeared in NSW.

2011 was also the year that the first dog tested positive to the Hendra virus in a natural environment. This unexpected transmission to a new species prompted an additional \$6 million in government funding towards Hendra virus research.



In July of the same year, the first confirmed outbreak of Hendra virus west of the Great Dividing Range was reported in Chinchilla, shattering perceptions that inland horse communities were safe from the virus.

As of September 2012, a total of thirty-nine outbreaks of Hendra virus had occurred, all involving infection of horses.

For further information, pre-recorded video footage or an interview, please contact:

Katherine Barbeler

Weber Shandwick

kbarbeler@webershandwick.com

02 9994 4406 / 0439 941 632

Andrés López-Varela

Weber Shandwick

alopez-varela@webershandwick.com

02 9994 4476 / 0405 631 945

Hannah Rayment

Weber Shandwick

hrayment@webershandwick.com

02 9994 4492 / 0425 329 921

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About CSIRO's Australian Animal Health Laboratory (AAHL)

CSIRO's Australian Animal Health Laboratory (AAHL) is a front line defence, helping to protect Australia from the threat of exotic and emerging animal diseases. The Laboratory combines a capacity to rapidly diagnose animal diseases with high quality research.

AAHL is the most sophisticated laboratory in the world for the safe handling and containment of animal diseases and was custom-built to ensure the containment of the most infectious agents known. For the past quarter of a century the Laboratory has played a vital role in protecting Australia from biosecurity threats and risks posed by serious exotic and endemic diseases.

Media contact: Ms Emma Wilkins, Acting Communication Manager Biosecurity Flagship 0409 031 658; Emma.Wilkins@csiro.au

About Henry M. Jackson Foundation for the Advancement of Military Medicine

The Henry M. Jackson Foundation for the Advancement of Military Medicine, Inc. (HJF) is a private, not-for-profit organization established in 1983 and authorized by the U.S. Congress to support medical research and education at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences and throughout the military medical community. For more information, visit www.hjf.org

About Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences

The Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences is the United States' federal health sciences university. USU students are primarily active-duty uniformed officers in the Army, Navy, Air Force and Public Health Service who have received specialized education in tropical and infectious diseases, preventive medicine, the neurosciences (to include TBI and PTSD), disaster response and humanitarian



assistance, and acute trauma care. A large percentage of the university's nearly 5,000 physician and 500 advanced practice nursing alumni have provided support, leadership and expertise to operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and throughout the globe. The University is committed to excellence in research with graduate programs in biomedical sciences and public health open to civilian and military applicants that have awarded more than 400 doctoral and 800 masters degrees to date. For more information, visit www.usuhs.mil.

About Australian Veterinary Association

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) is the only national organisation representing veterinarians in Australia. Its 7500 members come from all fields within the veterinary profession. Clinical practitioners work with companion animals, horses, farm animals, including 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.