

Hendra virus monitoring (contacts factsheet)

This fact sheet is specifically for people who have been exposed to a horse or human infected with Hendra virus. Please read the general [Hendra virus fact sheet](#) first.

Why am I being followed up?

You have been identified as someone who has had contact with a horse or human that has been confirmed to have Hendra virus infection.

What is the risk?

- Several hundred people have been exposed to Hendra virus infected horses and tested for infection - only a few of these people (seven as of October 2011) have become sick and no one has ever had a 'silent' infection without symptoms.
- The small number of people who have contracted Hendra virus infection all became sick following high level exposures to body fluids of an infected horse, such as doing autopsies on horses without wearing appropriate personal protective equipment, or being extensively sprayed with respiratory secretions.
- Many people have reported high level exposures to infected horses but have remained well.
- People are at some risk if they have had exposure to an infected horse's body fluids and appropriate personal protective equipment, including gloves and a mask, was not worn.
- People with high level exposures to infected horses are most at risk - no one with a lower level exposure has ever developed Hendra virus infection.
- Affected horses are thought to be potentially infectious to humans for a few days before they become sick but are most infectious after they become sick.
- No one has ever developed Hendra virus infection after exposure to an infected human.

What is the follow up?

- Public health unit staff identify people who may be at risk and contact them to assess their exposure.
- People who may be at risk of infection are given information about Hendra virus and asked to monitor their health.

- Blood tests are not routinely required following most exposures to horses or humans with Hendra virus infection, but arrangements will be made for testing where appropriate.
- People who have had high exposures to the body fluids of an infected horse may be offered testing and experimental treatment with a type of antibody that may prevent infection.

What if I get symptoms?

- Symptoms of Hendra virus infection in humans typically develop between 5 and 21 days after contact with an infectious horse.
- If you become unwell during this time you should seek medical advice promptly.
- Fever, cough, sore throat, headache and tiredness are common initial symptoms.
- Meningitis or encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) can develop.
- Symptoms of encephalitis include headache, high fever, and drowsiness, and sometimes convulsions and coma.
- Although there is no evidence of Hendra virus spreading from an infected person to another person, health care workers will take a cautious approach and wear personal protective equipment when caring for people suspected or confirmed to be infected.

Am I at risk to others?

- Providing you remain well, you are not at risk to other people and you are not restricted from doing anything or going anywhere while you are in the monitoring period.
- If you are being monitored for developing Hendra virus, you should not donate blood or any other tissue until the third set of blood tests (day 42) show that you have not developed Hendra virus antibodies.
- If you have recovered from Hendra virus infection, you should never donate blood or any other tissue.
- As a precaution you should not donate blood or any other tissue until you are cleared of infection.
- Whilst you remain well, you are not a risk to other people and you are not restricted from your usual activities.

How is it diagnosed?

- People with symptoms of suspected Hendra virus infection will usually have blood and urine tests. Depending on their symptoms they may also have nose/throat swabs and/or other tests.
- Testing for Hendra virus infection is only recommended for people who have had a high-level exposure.

How is it treated?

- There is no specific treatment for Hendra virus infection and cases are treated supportively in hospital or in intensive care.
- Antiviral medications have not been found to be effective in treating Hendra virus infection.
- Antibodies against Hendra virus have been used to treat people with the infection, but this treatment remains experimental.

Mental health support

This experience may be stressful for you and your family. If you feel worried or concerned it's a good idea to talk over your concerns with your doctor.

Support for veterinarians is also available from the [Australian Veterinary Association](#).

For further information please call your local public health unit on 1300 066 055.