

This is an open letter addressed to the wonderful and diverse equine community here in Queensland. From the outset I would like to make it clear that it expresses my own personal observations only. I own no horses, am not a practicing equine vet, have no links to Zoetis, but do have a degree in veterinary science and 34 years of experience working in the industry.

This letter has also been submitted to the proposed government inquiries.

Over the last few years I have followed the debate that has swirled around the subject of Hendra virus risk management with interest. More recently I have become alarmed, firstly by the prosecution of three equine veterinarians under the Worksafe Act and then by the way in which this action has indirectly led to the polarisation of the entire equine community. Effectively, the recent prosecutions have put both owners of unvaccinated horses and veterinarians into a 'no win' situation that is harming the industry.

In writing, it is not my intention to tell anyone what they should do next, rather I hope to provide many readers with 'some food for thought' by addressing some of the issues I repeatedly hear raised by horse owners and veterinarians on both sides of the debate, namely vaccination safety, the use of PPE and a veterinarian's liability in the event of a positive Hendra case.

If we don't all make more effort to keep an open mind, respect each other's point of view and then reach some common ground I fear that permanent damage will be done to the wonderful relationship that the equine community and equine veterinarians have both thus far benefitted from.

**To put my comments into context I would first like readers to consider three key points that I will quote directly from the Queensland Government's Hendra Virus Infection Prevention Advice.**

1. *"The Hendra 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."* (Page 24)
2. *"If HeV cannot be ruled out as a diagnosis, risk controls should be implemented before **anyone** contacts a sick horse, not after initial examination."* (Page 24)
3. *"Veterinarians should consider restricting high risk veterinary procedures to those necessary to obtain samples and /or provide immediate treatment and attend to the horse's welfare. Veterinarians should **AVOID** high risk procedures that have potential to result in high level of exposure to the horse's blood, respiratory fluids, tissues and other body fluids. "* (Pages 26 and 27)

**The first issue raised in the Hendra vaccination debate centred on the safety of the Hendra vaccination.**

1. From the outset I think it is important to clarify exactly what is meant by 'safety'. When injecting any foreign material into a horse be it a vitamin, drug or vaccine one can expect a certain number of reactions, however this does not mean any given product is not 'safe'.
2. All new vaccinations when they are first introduced have a requirement for veterinarians and owners to report all reactions to the Australian Pesticide and Veterinary Medicine Authority (AVPMA) a wholly independent government body. These reports are investigated,

analysed and compared with those for similar vaccinations on the market and a decision is made one way or another with regard to safety.

3. Following the administration of over 367,759 doses of the Hendra vaccine, the AVPMA has recently completed a detailed assessment of the Hendra vaccine and found it to be generally safe and effective against the Hendra virus thus granting it full registration. The official government APVMA website has this to say about the 'safety health and side effects' of the Hendra vaccine.

*"The approved label lists potential side effects, including:*

- *swelling and soreness at the site of vaccination*
- *increase in body temperature*
- *lethargy*
- *loss of appetite*
- *muscle stiffness and swelling in the joints (oedema)*
- *skin rashes (urticaria)*
- *colic.*

*These symptoms are generally short-lived and are typical of many vaccines. As with all vaccines, side effect symptoms may vary in severity and on some occasions may require veterinary intervention.*

*Although some side effects may be expected, it is important that people who observe an adverse effect report them to the veterinarian who administered the vaccine, the registration holder, or the APVMA."*

4. Despite the recent full registration of the Hendra vaccine, opinion about its safety remains divided with many owners claiming that their horses have experienced a much higher than normal range of reactions that were in some cases serious.
5. The equine industry as a whole and veterinarians in particular should remember that these owners have the right to be heard and their claims investigated further by an independent body to put the matter to rest for once and for all one way or another.
6. Horse owners also need to remember that they always could and still can report any adverse reactions to the Hendra vaccine to the APVMA for investigation. The AVPMA is a government body independent of both the manufacturer and veterinary community and they are obliged to investigate all reports.
7. There are also a number of initiatives underway at the parliamentary level intended to address the safety issue.

**More recently a great deal of emotion has erupted on both sides of the debate about whether or not veterinary practices are justified in adopting a policy of no longer treating unvaccinated horses.**

1. Many horse owners feel that it is a veterinary practice's moral and ethical responsibility to attend to all horses. This is not the case. For example if a client becomes a bad debtor the practice is not obliged to keep them as a client.
2. If a veterinary practice advises a client that they should vaccinate their horses against Hendra in the interest of their own safety, their horses safety and the safety of any

veterinary personal who attend to the horse and the client chooses not to follow this advice, then the veterinary practice is under no obligation to keep them as a client. The practice should respect the client's right not to vaccinate their horses and in turn the client should respect the right of any veterinary practice not to continue treating their unvaccinated horses.

3. Some people say that not treating unvaccinated horses is 'a money making exercise for the vets'. However, veterinary practices are in the business of taking care of horses so why would any one of them suddenly choose to take this course of action, which reduces the number of clients they can service and horses they can treat and is guaranteed to be damaging to their business? And why would so many suddenly choose to do it now, when the vaccine has already been available for a number of years?
4. The recent prosecution of three veterinarians under the Worksafe Act has made it clear that Work Place Health and Safety intend to hold the veterinary profession and not the owners responsible for their personal safety and that of anyone else who comes into contact with a sick horse in a positive Hendra virus case, even when the those same owners have chosen to ignore the professions advice to vaccinate their horses.
5. After talking to many veterinarians it is apparent that the sudden and relatively wide spread decision of many practices not to treat unvaccinated horses anymore comes down to a question of perceived risk. For many practices, the recently increased risk of prosecution under the Worksafe Act is simply one risk too far. Horse owners need to better understand all the potential risks that veterinarians face when treating their sick unvaccinated horses (even in full PPE) and then respect the right of any veterinary practice to formulate its own policy.
6. I will address the issue of whether or not veterinarians can or should continue to treat all sick unvaccinated horses indefinitely into the future with the use of full PPE later, suffice to say here and now that whilst PPE reduces the risk of exposure to the virus, it does not eliminate it all together.
7. For horse owners, the chance of their horse being exposed to Hendra virus has and will remain very, very small. For the veterinary profession, who carry out invasive procedures on sick horses every single day, week on week, month after month, year on year, the chance of eventually treating a Hendra infected horse and being exposed to all the attendant risks is exponentially higher.
8. As a business, all veterinary practices also have a legal obligation to provide a safe working environment for all their staff. The recent prosecutions, carried out under the Worksafe Act have made it very difficult for any employer to guarantee the safety of their employees if they are asked to treat unvaccinated horses even if they are wearing full PPE (see later). Therefore the easiest and most efficient way any veterinary practice owner can protect themselves and their staff from prosecution, Hendra and an increased risk of injury is to stop treating unvaccinated horses.

**The question of whether or not all veterinarians can/should continue treating sick unvaccinated horses with the aid of full PPE is another prominent topic for debate.**

This subject encompasses two very different issues which I will deal with separately:

#### **A. The welfare of horses**

1. First and foremost it is important to remember that 93 horses have either died or been put down as a result of Hendra virus and **wearing full PPE to examine such horses will not have saved their lives, where a vaccination would have.**

2. Even if all other sick unvaccinated horses were attended to by veterinarians wearing full PPE, **there still remains a massive welfare issue surrounding these horses.** Under the terms of the Queensland Government's Hendra Virus Infection Prevention Advice such horses cannot receive invasive diagnostic services or prompt and appropriate treatment until such time as a Hendra virus exclusion test has been performed.
3. Given that the Queensland Biosecurity Science Laboratory is closed over the week-end, such results can take anything from one to four days to complete. As a result many horses are being forced to suffer and their condition to deteriorate significantly whilst awaiting a result. The cost of eventual treatment for most owners inevitably increases significantly over time and in the very worst case scenario, horses are dying before appropriate treatment can be implemented.
4. In summary, the only way the welfare of all horses can be protected and veterinarians can ensure that their clients can be promptly and appropriately treated at all times is for owners to keep their horse's Hendra vaccinations up to date.

## **B. The safety of veterinarians working in full PPE**

1. Workplace Health and Safety and Biosecurity Queensland have produced a comprehensive array of guidelines requiring the use of full PPE when working with sick unvaccinated horses which are aimed at keeping all personal attending to such horses safe **from exposure to Hendra virus.**
2. What they have failed to take into account is that in so doing, they have inadvertently **made the everyday working environment for all equine veterinarians examining sick unvaccinated horses significantly LESS safe.**
3. Veterinarians fall into one of the highest risk categories for income protection insurance of all professions. This is for a very good reason. On a daily basis they deal with considerable risk:
  - Horses are very large strong and flighty animals
  - When sick, injured or in pain they are significantly more difficult to handle
  - Further, when examining sick horses, veterinarians are required to perform many procedures that horses fear, including the use of needles to take test samples.
  - The risk of severe injury to an equine practitioner from a sick horse's strike, bite or kick is ever present and the reason for our high insurance premiums
4. Veterinarians deal with this risk daily **by being very observant and 'in tune' with their whole environment.** They listen for any change in a horse's respiration, they watch out for the flick of an ear, they detect any shift in weight that might precede a strike or a kick. They have to have eyes in the back of their head and they are sure footed with very, very fast reflexes.
5. In contrast full PPE has been designed specifically **to isolate the wearer and thoroughly shield him from his environment.** The wearer's ears are covered by a hood, peripheral vision is obscured by goggles, movement is restricted by a double layer of clothes, sensitivity to touch is reduced by double gloves and the wearer's balance and speed of reaction is severely hampered by wearing wellington boots.
6. Add to this the fact that an already stressed horse will be further panicked when approached by something virtually unrecognisable as human and the risks increase even further.
7. Whilst the use of full PPE when treating a wide range of sick horses on a daily basis may seem like the answer because it protects vets from the possible but very low risk of exposure to Hendra virus, it must be noted that **PPE significantly increases the risk of an equine veterinarian suffering a serious or even fatal accident at work.**
8. Many equine vets don't feel comfortable taking on this additional risk on a daily basis indefinitely, so are now only willing to treat vaccinated horses.

**The subject of the veterinary prosecutions is closely linked to the liability veterinarians are now forced to face when they agree to be the 'vet on call' at any 'unvaccinated' equestrian event.**

1. Under the current guidelines, if a veterinarian is on call at an equestrian event and there is a possible case of Hendra virus infection in an unvaccinated horse, the veterinarian automatically becomes responsible for the safety of every other horse and rider at the show that could have come within 5 meters of the horse (unless the event organisers have agreed in writing to absolve the vet of this responsibility and take it on themselves, which very few do.)
2. Given the frequent interaction between horses, owners and the general public at these events, realistically a situation like this is virtually impossible to control. Yet if the vet fails to protect the health and safety of everyone at the 'unvaccinated' event, he can now be charged with a criminal offence.
3. This liability, and not the desire to force people to vaccinate, is the fundamental reason why so many veterinarians are no longer prepared to be 'vet on call' at an unvaccinated show.
4. This state of affairs is having a hugely negative impact on the good relations event organisers and equine veterinarians have historically held and it is resulting in the cancellation of many shows. This issue also needs to be urgently addressed.

**The higher cost of the Hendra vaccination has been questioned and Zoetis have been accused of deliberately gouging the equine community. So, while reiterating that I have no links with Zoetis, I would like to make the following observations.**

1. Hendra virus has only been diagnosed in a relatively narrow strip along the eastern seaboard of just two states in the relatively sparsely populated country of Australia. As a result the market for the vaccine is remarkably small.
2. In contrast, because Hendra virus is potentially fatal to humans the costs of developing and then testing the Hendra vaccine have been considerably higher than for most other vaccines on the market.
3. The ability for Zoetis to recover their enhanced research and development costs in such a small market is reduced and this has meant that the vaccine must inevitably cost more.
4. Zoetis is a large multinational company selling multiple different vaccines to hundreds of different countries worldwide. Far from Zoetis benefitting enormously from the miniscule sales of Hendra vaccinations here, I think Australia has benefitted enormously from a multinational company that has put all their international resources into developing a vaccination that will keep our tiny population of horses, horse owners and vets safe.
5. Whether a person chooses to use the vaccine or not is up to them, but if they don't, I believe that they and not their veterinarians, should be held responsible for the consequences.

### **Looking to the future**

1. It is important for the equine industries in Queensland to consider their long term future when criticising the veterinary profession for not wishing to work in full PPE on a daily basis, risking their lives and fearing prosecution while attending to their sick unvaccinated horses. Three vets have died and three have been prosecuted and that is enough.
2. Just as owners strongly defend their right to choose, so veterinarians also have a choice about where they work and Queensland has already lost many valuable and experienced equine practitioners to other states because the vets have expressed a preference not to risk their lives and livelihoods daily by working in a Hendra endemic area on unvaccinated horses.

3. Due to the low uptake of the vaccination, equine veterinary practices in high risk Hendra areas are finding it harder and harder to recruit and retain experienced staff. After advertising, some wait months to receive even one application. One of the first questions a potential new recruit or recent graduate will ask is, 'Is your practice in a Hendra endemic area?' The second question they will ask is 'Does your practice have a Hendra vaccination only policy?' Given a choice most veterinarians will select the best job they can find in a 'Vaccination only clinic' or 'Hendra free area'.
4. The prosecution of veterinarians under the Worksafe Act for failing to adequately protect horse owners who acted against their vets advice and chose not to vaccinate their horses, has only added to this brain drain. Why would the best veterinarians, with the 'pick of the jobs' choose to risk their lives and livelihoods by working in Hendra endemic areas on unvaccinated horses?
5. If the equine industry in Queensland wishes to remain competitive and retain the high quality veterinary services that it has enjoyed thus far, it should also give consideration to this brain drain when formulating future policy. Instead of constantly criticising and blaming their veterinarians, please listen to what they are saying and be prepared to work together.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

*Carol Smith*

Carol Smith B.Vet.Med.

### **Support for the observations made in my open letter by horse owners and veterinarians a like:**



#### **Jimmy Pearce website**

[Carol Smith to Jimmy Pearce - ALP Member for Mirani](#)

January 12 at 1:36pm ·

This is an open letter addressed to the wonderful and diverse equine community here in Queensland. From the outset I would like to make it clear that it expresses my own personal observations only. I own no horses, am not a practicing equine vet, have no links to Zoetis, but do have a degree in veterinary science and 34 years of experience working in the industry.

This letter has also been submitted to the proposed government inquiries.

Over the last few years I have followe...

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93 Likes 81 Comments 41 Shares

\*\*\*\*\* Fabulous letter Carol...very well thought out and listing all facts as they stand. Well done and you have so much support .

\*\*\*\*\* Fantastic letter Carol Smith which sums the situation up very well. You have my full support and I thank you for taking the time to pen this letter on the subject. There are many, many others who also support your view.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [12](#) · [January 13 at 5:14pm](#)

\*\*\*\*\* Great letter, Carol. Thanks for posting it up. Always good to read facts laid out.

[nlike](#) · [Reply](#) · [6](#) · [January 13 at 3:31pm](#)

\*\*\*\*\*Excellent letter! I continue to vaccinate all my horses. I ensure that the vet injects after thorough skin cleaning & injects deep IM. I have had only one horse with an adverse side reaction, which was a cold, painless lump. This occurred after insufficiently deep IM injection. This horse has never had an adverse reaction again.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [10](#) · [January 12 at 8:36pm](#)

\*\*\*\*\*Awesome letter Carol Smith thankyou!!

[Unlike](#) · [Reply](#) · [7](#) · [January 12 at 10:36pm](#)

\*\*\*\*\* Fantastic letter, well said Carol Smith.

[Unlike](#) · [Reply](#) · [6](#) · [January 12 at 10:39pm](#)

\*\*\*\*\* A well thought out letter. Carol Smith. Thank you.

[Unlike](#) · [Reply](#) · [9](#) · [January 12 at 10:53pm](#)

\*\*\*\*\* Perfect! Eloquent and addresses every point. Hope it will help to educate at least a few

[Unlike](#) · [Reply](#) · [6](#) · [January 12 at 11:54pm](#)

\*\*\*\*\*Hi Carol Just wanted to say thankyou for taking the time to write your very comprehensive letter re HeV. Some of the comments by others are just downright rude and nasty but please know that there are many of us who fully support your balanced view. Some will never see past their own skewed opinion as they are incapable of considering anyone else in their equation BUT for those sitting on the fence in the middle trying to make a balanced choice, it is so important that information like yours showing all aspects are available to be considered. Anyway thankyou again from "just a horseowner and a mum" who also sees my vet/s as people too and in some cases they just happen to have become my friends as well.

### Shared to another website

\*\*\*\*\*

January 12 at 9:12pm

Written by my previous boss at Equine Veterinary Services in Toowoomba, Queensland. Hendra is the main reason I left Queensland, and will not work in Queensland or NSW again. The two day wait for result is agonising. For the horse. For the owner. For the vet.

This is an open letter addressed to the wonderful and diverse equine community here in Queensland. From the outset I would like to make it clear that it expresses my own personal observations only. I own no horses, am...

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72 people like this.

\*\*\*\*\*Well said!

[Unlike](#) · [Reply](#) · 4 · [January 12 at 9:32pm](#)

\*\*\*\*\* ...drop the mic!

THIS needs widespread publication. Even toned and well considered.

[Unlike](#) · [Reply](#) · 8 · [January 12 at 9:35pm](#)

\*\*\*\*\*Please can we get permission to share to other vets?

[Unlike](#) · [Reply](#) · 8 · [January 12 at 9:49pm](#)

\*\*\*\*\*Superbly considered and written

[Unlike](#) · [Reply](#) · 2 · [January 12 at 9:52pm](#)

\*\*\*\*\* Best article I have read which summarises this convoluted topic very well

[Unlike](#) · [Reply](#) · 3 · [January 12 at 10:01pm](#)

\*\*\*\*\* Well said! Best Hendra letter I've read.

[Unlike](#) · [Reply](#) · 2 · [January 12 at 10:07pm](#)

\*\*\*\*\* Can we please share this letter Lynsey? Awesome letter

[Unlike](#) · [Reply](#) · 2 · [January 12 at 10:09pm](#)

\*\*\*\*\* I wanna share this how can I share this info???

[Unlike](#) · [Reply](#) · 2 · [January 12 at 10:10pm](#)

\*\*\*\*\* Very balanced and well written

[Unlike](#) · [Reply](#) · 2 · [January 12 at 10:10pm](#)

\*\*\*\*\* Fantastic. If I could "love" this post rather than just "like" it, I would. Everything I have been thinking and been unable to put into words. Can we please share this? Not just with other vets - with horse people?

[Unlike](#) · [Reply](#) · 5 · [January 12 at 10:13pm](#) · [Edited](#)

\*\*\*\*\* Thank god I don't work with horses

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 1 · [January 12 at 10:17pm](#)



## **PRESS RELEASE Jimmy Pearce ALP member for Mirani**

### **Integrity of Queensland Veterinary Services Questioned**

Central Queensland Labor MP Jim Pearce has lashed out at State Veterinary services accusing some vets of failing the horse industry and is raising questions about the integrity of the 'no treat policy' in an attempt to boost lagging sales of the Hendra Virus Vaccine.

Mr Pearce said he was personally angered by the actions of some vets who had ignored their own professional Code of.

"The code includes such commitments as to always consider the health welfare and respectful treatment of the animal to take personal responsibility to uphold the good reputation and integrity of the veterinary profession."

"These skilled individuals are part of a profession that is supposed to be disciplined and adhere to high ethical standards and uphold themselves, their knowledge and skills in the interest of others."

Mr Pearce said he has also lost confidence in the Governments workplace health and safety which has sat on its hands ignoring the huge amount of misrepresentation of fact, misinformation and the giant con being peddled through statements and printed propaganda.

"I am certain that workplace health and safety public servants are falling well short of community expectations under the public Sector Ethics Act."

"Their ethical principles include integrity and impartiality, promoting the public good, commitment to the system of Government as well as accountability and integrity."

"They are also leaving themselves wide open for breaching the principles of 'Duty of Care'."

Mr Pearce said there was no compulsory Hendra vaccination rule in Queensland, the vaccine is advertised as not 100% effective and best practice use of Person Protective Equipment was the best proven protection against a Hendra infection.

"There are people behind the 'no vac no treat' policy who are in top influential positions where there are concerns around conflict of interest"

"what is happening is that there is just too many cases of adverse reactions to vaccinations, vaccine sales are well below sales expectations so key players have turned to bullying clients into vaccination of their animals."

"There is evidence of possible collusion which requires reporting to the proper authorities for investigation."

Mr Pearce said it was disappointing that this abuse of human rights had to get to where decisive action was required, I did give these characters plenty of time to step forward and accept responsibility for what is poor behaviour from some of the states most skilled Veterinarians.

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## **RESPONSE to Media release by Carol Smith**

With respect, I would like to respond to the claims made by Mr Jimmy Pearce MP, ALP Member for Mirani, questioning the integrity of veterinarians claiming that they are ignoring their own code of professional conduct which includes "commitments as to always consider the health, welfare and respectful treatment of the animal."

- According to Biosecurity Queensland Chief Veterinary Officer at least 93 horses have died from Hendra virus infection.
- The governments own Hendra Virus Infection Prevention Advice clearly states "*The Hendra 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.*" Therefore the

BEST way to ensure the health and welfare of all horses and the safety of horse owners and veterinary personal alike is clearly through VACCINATION and NOT the use of full PPE.)

- The governments own AVPMA has declared the vaccine safe to use, including recently extending the full registration to include the safe vaccination of pregnant mares.
- In a Media Statement (19<sup>th</sup> Novemebr 2015) the ALP Minister for Agriculture Bill Byrne said: “The Department of Agriculture RECOMMENDS the vaccination of horses against Hendra.”
- The governments own Hendra Virus Infection Prevention Advice clearly states that even when suited up in full PPE “*Veterinarians should consider restricting high risk veterinary procedures to those necessary to obtain samples and /or provide immediate treatment and attend to the horse’s welfare. Veterinarians should AVOID high risk procedures that have potential to result in high level of exposure to the horse’s blood, respiratory fluids, tissues and other body fluids.*” ...meaning that UNVACCINATED HORSES ALL FACE WELFARE ISSUES because they cannot always be treated appropriately, even when a veterinarian attends in full PPE, until an exclusion test has been completed.

Taking all of the above GOVERNMENT advice into consideration it is abundantly clear that when veterinarians advise their clients to vaccinate their horses against Hendra they are not “attempting to boost lagging sales of the Hendra Virus Vaccine” but rather taking the HEALTH and WELFARE of unvaccinated horses into consideration. They are also acting in accordance with the best government advice in order to protect the health and safety of all horse owners and any veterinary staff coming into contact with sick horses. By vaccinating, not only will horses and horse owners be protected against a deadly disease but all horses will be able to receive full and appropriate diagnostic services and then prompt and appropriate treatment, in the best interest of the horse’s welfare, should they fall sick.

Owners choosing not to vaccinate their fit and healthy horses against Hendra are the ones showing no concern for the health or welfare of the majority of their horses. Many, many times more horses have died from Hendra or suffered from an inability to be appropriately treated before an exclusion test has been performed, than have had a serious reaction to the Hendra vaccine. Far from blaming the veterinary profession when their horses can no longer receive prompt and appropriate treatment, due to the strict government regulations being enforced through prosecutions, owners need to stop and consider what the outcome of each welfare case may have been, had they instead vaccinated their horses.

Prior to the prosecutions, most veterinarians were prepared to attend to sick unvaccinated horses. However, the realisation that veterinarians are being held responsible for the personal safety of horse owners who deliberately choose to not vaccinate their horses against the veterinarians advice has changed this working dynamic forever. The fact that veterinarians have also been legislated into wearing full PPE to attend to any horse where Hendra virus cannot be ruled out (the majority of sick horses) has placed veterinarians into an even more untenable and dangerous situation.

Given that an apparently healthy horse can be shedding infectious levels of Hendra virus for several days prior to the onset of clinical signs, should all jockeys, show jumpers jump, polo players, campdrafters etc. also be forced to compete in full PPE and wellington boots from now on? Veterinarians work closely with horses every day and their safety has been severely compromised as much as a rider’s performance would be, by the unrealistic expectation that they must all wear full PPE when treating any sick unvaccinated horse from now on.

Veterinarians are highly trained and experienced professionals and they are prepared to wear full PPE to examine high risk cases where unvaccinated horses are severely depressed, recumbent or already dead. Not many veterinarians are also prepared to wear full PPE daily to untangle a two year

old unbroken colt caught up in a barb wire fence, or a 600kg stallion crashing around a loose box in a panic due to undiagnosed pain, or a flighty thoroughbred rearing up and striking out in fear at their approach. Yet, from now on, if veterinarians don't wear full PPE to examine these sick unvaccinated horses they could be breaking the law and face the risk of prosecution. This situation is another very relevant reason why vets are choosing to introduce 'vaccination only' policies instead. It is totally misleading and grossly unfair for Workplace Health and Safety and the horse owning public to compare any of the above situations to that of a Doctor putting on a mask and pulling on a pair of gloves before examining a patient lying on a bed.

WHS are supposed to provide a safer working environment for everyone but they have done just the opposite for many veterinarians. By removing their ability to show any discretion regarding their own personal safety when treating sick unvaccinated horses, veterinarians must now either compromise their own safety every day or not wear full PPE and run the risk prosecution. This is not a choice that many veterinarians are prepared to make, so they have been left with no alternative but to treat vaccinated horses only, leave Queensland or leave the profession.

Owners who wish to continue receiving the services of a veterinarian should be prepared to accept the veterinarian's advice as it pertains to their own personal safety, the health and welfare of their horses and the continued health and welfare of their veterinarian, especially when their veterinarian is acting upon the best government advice. Owners that do not wish to accept the consequences of the government's advice should:

- Challenge the relevant government authorities that are driving this change by prosecuting veterinarians who are NOT responsible for the presence of Hendra virus, or the risk horse owners take by not vaccinating their horses, or the current legislation which is forcing veterinarians to work in full PPE daily or face prosecution. Veterinarians also have a right to keep themselves safe.
- Accept that every veterinarian also has a 'duty of care' under the Worksafe Act to provide a safe working environment for his staff and his CLIENTS and that this can BEST be achieved through a Hendra vaccination policy.
- Offer to accept full responsibility for their own personal safety, the health and welfare of their own unvaccinated horses, PLUS the health and safety of any veterinary surgeon attending to their horses when they choose not to vaccinate.
- Acknowledge that it is not a 'human right' for any person to demand that another person continually put their own health, safety, livelihood and life at risk in order to treat sick unvaccinated horses when there is an effective vaccine available.

When it comes to dealing with the risk of exposure to Hendra virus, the landscape in Queensland has changed forever. There is no going back. The sooner that horse owners accept this new working paradigm the sooner the good working relationship with their veterinarian can resume.

### **SUPPORT for response to media release**

**Carol Smith**

February 25 at 5:37pm

### **PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO HENDRA**

The announcement of this inquiry is a very encouraging step forward for all veterinarians:

Given that Peter Wellington was initially only advocating for an inquiry into the proclaimed lack of safety of the Hendra Vaccine, it is interesting to note the very much broader terms that the inquiry has actually been mandated to investigate.

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Comment

Likes 67

\*\*\*\*\* Awesome commentary.

Unlike · Reply · 3 · February 25 at 6:19pm

\*\*\*\*\* <standing ovation>

Unlike · Reply · 3 · February 25 at 6:26pm

\*\*\*\*\* Amen!!

Unlike · Reply · 2 · February 25 at 6:27pm

\*\*\*\*\* Fantastically written. ☐

Unlike · Reply · 2 · February 25 at 6:40pm

\*\*\*\*\* thank god, better not sell all the vet gear just yet! smile emoticon

Unlike · Reply · 1 · February 25 at 7:16pm

\*\*\*\*\* Still need 1. Hendra Insurance - come on Guild. 2. Client waiver form. 3. Crush side test. Why was that canned - seriously?? 4. QWHS change prosecutions from "guidelines" to proceedings.

Like · Reply · February 25 at 7:22pm

\*\*\*\*\* <http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/.../09-HendraVirusVacc>

Queensland Parliament

PARLIAMENT.QLD.GOV.AU

Unlike · Reply · 3 · February 25 at 7:29pm

\*\*\*\*\* Jimmy Smith's FB comment that Carol has replied to:

<https://www.facebook.com/jimmypearce.queensland/posts/960531190705347...See More>

Unlike · Reply · 5 · February 25 at 7:46pm · Edited

\*\*\*\*\* Here here

Like · Reply · 1 · February 25 at 8:08pm

\*\*\*\*\* I want to unlike it so I can like it again

Like · Reply · 5 · February 25 at 8:34pm

\*\*\*\*\* Brilliantly well written Carol! Thank you!

Like · Reply · 2 · February 25 at 8:50pm

\*\*\*\*\* Thanks Carol

Like · Reply · 1 · February 26 at 6:33am · Edited

\*\*\*\*\* What everyone else said. Great stuff Carol.

Like · Reply · 1 · February 25 at 10:00pm

\*\*\*\*\* Thanks Carol smile emoticon

Like · Reply · 1 · February 25 at 11:06pm

\*\*\*\*\* Can we share it?

Like · Reply · 1 · February 25 at 11:06pm

This comment has been hidden.

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Write a reply...

\*\*\*\*\* I'm am bamboozled by the attitude of some of the public. Where do they get the idea that they have the right to ask horse vets to risk their lives when there is a reasonable means of protection for them through vaccination.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 4 · February 25 at 11:20pm

\*\*\*\*\* Well done guys. Keep up the fight, all we can do is keep educating horse owners, and concentrate on your important clients (they'll all be vaccinating anyway). The idiot out for a dig about \$\$\$ has no idea.

The vaccination has been priced very much in favour of the horse owner and prices and extremely reasonable and responsible throughout the vet profession.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · 4 · February 26 at 7:09pm

\*\*\*\*\* I fully support everything written here. Beautifully worded. Thanks Carol!!

[Unlike](#) · [Reply](#) · 2 · February 25 at 6:51pm

\*\*\*\*\* What a wonderfully even handed response. Great to see the serious issue being discussed in a calm way without the hyperbole.

I hope the inquiry does get to the bottom of QWHS plans and ideas and gives clear guidance to Vets as to what they are truly responsible for. I don't think it is going to be quite the witch hunt that some are frothing for.

[Unlike](#) · [Reply](#) · 3 · February 25 at 7:48pm

\*\*\*\*\* Fully support all that you have written and I sincerely hope this inquiry provides clarification and clear guidelines for everyone to follow.

[Unlike](#) · [Reply](#) · 1 · February 25 at 8:13pm

\*\*\*\*\* Couldn't agree more with you Carol!

[Unlike](#) · [Reply](#) · 3 · February 25 at 8:51pm

\*\*\*\*\* I agree with Carol completely. Peter as no vaccine is 100% either is there a 100% guarantee of safety with PPE breaches can occur also PPE is not as easy to manoeuvre in as seems to be the assumption. I don't feel vets are hiding when they decide to make a considered choice not to put themselves at risk. Who has the right to take that choice away from them?

[Unlike](#) · [Reply](#) · 1 · February 25 at 11:14pm

\*\*\*\*\* Thank you carol for writing this well worded letter. I hope the committee will clarify points such as responsibility of providing for health and welfare to horses. Further, I would encourage those working on the committee to ensure the health and welfare of horses, and the people entrusted to care for them, is kept as the top priority in all decisions. Thanks again

[Unlike](#) · [Reply](#) · 2 · February 26 at 2:56pm

\*\*\*\*\* Thank you Carol, wholeheartedly agree with every word!

[Unlike](#) · [Reply](#) · 1 · February 26 at 9:05pm

\*\*\*\*\* Thanks for your efforts replying on behalf on very many practitioners, Carol. The ill-conceived WHS prosecutions have completely changed the options for treating ill unvaccinated horses. Prior to these prosecutions, I was comfortable to use my own professional judgment and a quick risk analysis to determine the appropriate degree of protection for myself and my clients that was necessary for each case. However, there is no longer any option due to the actions of the Govt's own WHS officers who instigated the prosecutions. The

Member for Mirani would do better to direct his vitriole towards the policy makers that have removed the ability of vets to exercise clinical judgement in deciding what the appropri

[Unlike](#) · [Reply](#) · 3 · February 26 at 9:39pm

\*\*\*\*\* .....what the appropriate veterinary response is in each case. I suggest that disgruntled clients who can't get their ill unvaccinated horse visited by a practitioner be directed to contact a Govt vet for advice, as it is the Govt's own actions that has caused the present dilemma.

[Unlike](#) · [Reply](#) · 2 · February 26 at 9:44pm



## EQUINE VETERINARY SERVICES

Dr. John Barnwell M. V. B.  
Dr. Ayla Hunt B.V.Sc.

Dr. Lachlan Perkins B.V.Sc.  
Dr. Carol Smith B.Vet.Med.

31 Luck Road, Hodgsonvale, Queensland, 4352

ABN 90669022629

2<sup>nd</sup> February 2016

Agriculture and Environment Committee  
Parliament House  
George Street  
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Phone: 07 3553 6662  
Fax: 07 3553 6699  
Email: [aec@parliament.qld.gov.au](mailto:aec@parliament.qld.gov.au)

Dear Committee,

I would like to make a submission to the inquiry into the Hendra virus vaccine and its use by veterinarians in Queensland.

It is of grave concern to me that WHS are prosecuting veterinarians working at the coal face with Hendra virus infection in Queensland, based on guidelines that are impossible to adopt in their entirety without severely compromising the workplace health and safety of every veterinarian and the health and welfare of thousands of horses.

The point I would like to address in particular is the expectation from Biosecurity Queensland that *"whenever HeV cannot be ruled out as a diagnosis, risk controls should be implemented before anyone contacts a sick horse, not after initial examination."* Under the current guidelines the only acceptable level of PPE when examining a horse that could possibly have Hendra is to be fully suited up.

Given that Hendra virus presents with a wide range of clinical signs that are commonly associated with many other conditions, Hendra virus can only be definitively ruled out in the majority of sick unvaccinated horses following a Hendra virus exclusion test. This means that virtually every time a vet is called out to examine a sick unvaccinated horse he is expected to wear a full suit of PPE. As explained very clearly in Carol Smith's open letter, this requirement has hugely increased the risk of serious accident or injury for many veterinarians everyday in an attempt to reduce the very limited risk of exposure to Hendra virus.

That working as an equine veterinarian is a dangerous enough occupation without the additional use of full PPE can best be illustrated by my own personal experience. I have worked in the industry for 34 years and always strived to maintain the highest possible safety standards in order to protect my own life. Despite this, over the course of three decades I have sustained the following injuries whilst working with horses:

1. Bilateral ruptured biceps tendon insertions from a horse rearing up beside me during a procedure.
2. Six broken ribs, and a haematoma on the liver from being double barreled (both hind feet) in the chest while scanning a mare held in a good set of stocks.
3. A fracture dislocation of the left ankle requiring plates and screws from a kick sustained whilst attempting to tranquilise a three year old unbroken stallion.
4. Ruptured medial collateral and anterior cruciate ligaments requiring a total right knee reconstruction from a kick sustained during a standing procedure.

I can assure you that such serious injuries are not uncommon amongst others in the profession and the enforcement of regulations requiring veterinarians to work in full PPE without any consideration for their own safety, through the prosecution of three veterinarians under the Worksafe Act, is a large factor driving some veterinarians to either leave the profession or work with vaccinated horses only.

My practice has written to all existing clients advising them that it is our intention to introduce a vaccination only policy in due course, thus allowing clients time to vaccinate in the best interests of their welfare of the horses.

Please find copy of letter attached

Yours faithfully,

  
John Barnwell





# EQUINE VETERINARY SERVICES

Dr. John Barnwell M. V. B.

Dr. Lachlan Perkins B.V.Sc.

Dr. Ayla Hunt B.V.Sc.

31 Luck Road, Hodgsonvale, Queensland, 4352

ABN 90669022629

Dear Client

## Re: Hendra virus risk management and the welfare of horses.

Hendra is a biosecurity level 4 virus (the same category as Ebola) that is carried by flying foxes and infects horses and humans. 93 horses have tested positive for Hendra and either died or been put down. Four human deaths have occurred (all linked to the equine veterinary profession) from treating infected horses. In the last three years seven horse owners have also been exposed to the potentially deadly virus through their horses and required hospitalisation for monoclonal antibodies. Flying foxes in the Toowoomba area have tested positive for antibodies to this virus.

Biosecurity Queensland have therefore released very strict guidelines for veterinarians that dictate how we must treat horses that could potentially have Hendra virus.

**The guidelines state that any sick unvaccinated horses that have any of these common symptoms (respiratory signs, nervous signs, unexplained temperatures, increased heart rates, shifting lameness, or symptoms of colic) should be treated as if they could have Hendra until such time as a negative Hendra virus exclusion test has been obtained.**

The guidelines require the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) to obtain test samples and place a restraint on performing any invasive procedures (such as stomach tubing, endoscopy, rectals or drips) on sick horses until the test results are obtained. This severely limits our ability to make a diagnosis and implement appropriate treatment at the time.

**Given that a Hendra exclusion test can take anything from one to four days to complete, these restrictions are having a serious impact on the welfare of unvaccinated horses, some of whom are dying before appropriate treatment or referral can take place.**

**Any veterinarian who fails to adhere to these guidelines could be charged with a criminal offence.** Workplace Health and Safety are extremely serious about enforcing these guidelines as evidenced by the fact that three veterinarians, who agreed to treat unvaccinated sick horses on behalf of their owners before the results of Hendra exclusion tests were obtained, are now being prosecuted for alleged breaches of the Workplace Health and Safety Act. Any veterinarian found guilty of breaching the act faces fines of up to \$500,000 and possible jail time.

We would therefore like to take this opportunity to ask you to carefully consider all of the possible consequences of any decision you make about whether or not to vaccinate your horses. If you choose not to vaccinate you may be putting your own life at risk as well as seriously limiting your vet's ability to promptly and appropriately treat any of your horses should they get colic or fall sick before a Hendra exclusion test has been performed. Such avoidable delays could have fatal consequences for acute cases.

**Equine Veterinary Services believes that the vaccine is the single most effective way of reducing the risk of Hendra virus infection in horses and humans, of providing a safe working environment for everyone and ensuring that your horses can be treated promptly and appropriately at all times.** Over 405,000 doses of the Hendra vaccination have already been given and it is scientifically proven to offer excellent protection against the virus, so we strongly recommend the vaccination of all horses.

In order to protect their own lives and livelihoods, many veterinarians have already stopped seeing unvaccinated horses. Equine Veterinary Services believes that you need time to seriously consider vaccinating, so we will continue to attend to your sick unvaccinated horses and offer you appropriate advice and treatment where ever possible but only in strict accordance with the Biosecurity Queensland guidelines. This will mean that, in many instances, we may not be able to provide diagnostic services or appropriate treatment until a Hendra exclusion test has been performed. The owner of any unvaccinated horse and not the attending veterinarian will be responsible for any outcome that occurs as a result of these necessary delays.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch with any of our staff if you have any further questions or concerns relating to the Hendra vaccination itself or the immediate welfare of your horses in light of this advice.

Yours faithfully,

*John Barnwell*

And all the staff at Equine Veterinary Services.

Office/Accounts: 07 4630 9983

Fax: 07 4630 9984

[www.equineveterinaryservices.com.au](http://www.equineveterinaryservices.com.au)

Email: [admin@equineveterinaryservices.com.au](mailto:admin@equineveterinaryservices.com.au)

## A selection of comments that help to highlight the Brain Drain

\*\*\*\*\*Written by my previous boss at Equine Veterinary Services in Toowoomba, Queensland. Hendra is the main reason I left Queensland, and will not work in Queensland or NSW again. The two day wait for result is agonising. For the horse. For the owner. For the vet.

\*\*\*\*\* I used to do mixed practice which was mainly smallish and equine...I am now a full time small animal vet and don't see myself ever going back to horses. Not worth the risk to my life (and as a kiwi living permanently in Aussie I'm also not eligible for...[See More](#)

\*\*\*\*\* I was in mixed practice as a new grad and there is definitely no way I'd go back to it and the politics now associated with this. I agree with all of what you have stated.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · January 13 at 6:39pm

\*\*\*\*\* Thanks Carol, very well written. But there is no point. They don't want to vaccinate, vets don't want to go to a sick horse they can't fully treat. Impasse. Vet practices can't get vets to do horse work = No horse vets. That should make the horse vet haters happy. It's such a crappy, crappy situation, the breaking point was the veterinary prosecutions frown emoticon

\*\*\*\*\* Thanks Carol, I do hope there are people who read your letter with an open mind. At the end of the day if I were a mechanic I would choose of I were happy to work in a high risk (PPE required) job or a lower risk job. My Job. My Qualification. My life. My family. My choice. I choose not to see at-risk horses. That is my right as a professional, as an Australian, its as fundamental as freedom of speech.

\*\*\*\*\* Well done [Carol Smith](#) the 'Vets With Brains' will know exactly what you're talking about. By the way, how are they going to get vets out to any horse when we all get so frustrated we move? Just like I did. And honestly I won't go back to Queensland or NSW as an equine vet. I can see a shortage coming up! Hope all is well with you and let me know if there is anything I can do. 100% behind you. Excellent letter !

\*\*\*\*\* Because very few vets in endemic areas are now prepared to take the risk of treating unvaccinated horses for the reasons well outlined in Carole's excellent letter. My question is WHY does this market of horse owners refuse to vaccinate when CLEARLY the welfare of their horses, themselves, and people coming into contact with their horses is better protected by vaccination. What is their reasoning when all of the evidence indicates that the vaccination is safe and that reactions to the vaccine are minimal? WHY? It is a WELFARE issue and the welfare of the horse and human should be paramount. Non vaccinated horses do not get the option of PPE, they die. Those horse owners genuinely concerned for their horse's welfare and that of their veterinarian will vaccinate. It is a paradox to cite horse welfare reasons as an argument against vaccination, and those doing so lack empathy for the veterinary professionals dealing with sick horses in endemic areas.

\*\*\*\*\* A friend of mine (a vet studying OHS for a change of career) shared this post to me. As a mixed animal vet working in Victoria, I treat a range of animals, including horses. For myself as a vet, I am thankful I work in Victoria- I don't have to ask myself if every sick horse I see has Hendra. I know I could use PPE for the examination, but I would always be scared that what if it fails? And what about my clients that have been handling that horse before I got there? They don't have protective equipment- have they gotten Hendra?. If the horse is ill and requires treatment, how can you wait until you get the results from exclusion? And how are the owners going to go on nursing it? What if they get Hendra? That would be my responsibility and if that happen.... it would be horrible. If a client of mine died from an infection caught from an animal that was in my care it would almost mean my leaving the profession. So I understand why vets in endemic areas are asking for vaccination- it can save the life of their patients and their clients and reduces the stress of visiting sick animals because they can focus on what is wrong with your horse, and not do they have their PPE on properly. The presence of Hendra in QLD and northern NSW means that I am unlikely to take a job that involves visiting sick horses in those areas. I am not a vet for the money- ask my accountant. I am sure that there are unscrupulous people out there who would push the vaccination when it was unnecessary, however implying that practices are just wanting to vaccinate horses for the \$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$ is wrong. They are pushing the vaccination so that they don't have to watch horses dying of Hendra, and so they know that their clients AND vets have the BEST PROTECTION they can

have. If you have had an adverse reaction, then make certain it is reported. The vaccine company needs that information to make the vaccine safer. If there was a human Hendra vaccination, as a vet working in endemic areas then I would use it. But until that time, I am glad I work in Victoria, and the worst I have to deal with is colics, lameness and snotty noses.

[Unlike](#) · [Reply](#) · [17](#) · [January 13 at 2:54pm](#) · [Edited](#)

\*\*\*\*\* Peter most vets around here just don't see horses anymore. There's only one practice that only attends vaccinated nags. Horses are the losers. It needs fixing.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [February 26 at 10:55am](#)

# Queensland Endurance Riders Association

[Gerard Bou](#)

February 28 at 7:06pm

Dear QERA members,

As you are all aware Hendra virus has been our most serious issue facing the sport for some years. The situation has reached a point where action must be taken. Our 2016 ride calendar and our future is at serious risk. Vets are faced with impossible workplace health and safety regulations coupled with risk management and insurance problems that makes the task of vetting at endurance rides and treating horses extremely difficult. Likewise, onerous biosecurity regimes are making it difficult for ride clubs to hold events. Our vet numbers are in a steady decline and are not sufficient to continue to run rides in our division.

QERA has proposed to ride clubs affected by this issue that Hendra vaccinated only test events be run in order to save their rides from cancellation and to bring some vets back to our sport. It will also allow us to gauge the economic realities of future events. Endurance relies at its core on veterinarians and volunteers. Without these there is no endurance.

QERA has offered some incentive to ride clubs to take the leap and run vaccinated only rides. The "test event" period shall be from April 16 to June 26. All clubs with rides in this period shall have some financial assistance from QERA in the form of Head vet and Treatment vet payments should they choose to run a vaccinated only event to help cope with what may be smaller ride entry numbers.

We understand that this may cause angst among some of our membership. I can assure you that QERA has exhausted all avenues over the last 4 years trying to solve this problem. It is now a simple reality. No vets means no rides.

The rides in this period that will be vaccinated only events shall be advertised as such in the coming days. We ask that you support these clubs and our veterinary team. By starting these test events in April and having the trial run until June it allows sufficient time for those who choose to vaccinate the opportunity to do so. Some events may be vaccinated only and some may not. QERA will reassess the situation after this period.

We would like members to understand that the choice is up to the ride clubs and this is not a mandate. We will however offer all support to the vets and the ride clubs in their endeavours. All communications on this issue shall be monitored by QERA closely.

Gerard Bou

QERA President

[Like](#)  
[Share](#)

## EVIDENCE of welfare issues

11 mins

This is what I dont understand..how a vet can stand by and not do ANYTHING to help.



\*\*\*\*\* added 2 new photos.

Yesterday at 8:38am

This photo taken yesterday is of our 24 year old fur child Jackie's face post severe colic after thumping on the ground and violently thrashing around for 24 hours. Please be aware horsie friends that if your horse is not up to date with the Hendra vaccine they will be refused treatment by the vet until the clearance for Hendra comes through - something we clearly did not know. The most agonizing time of our lives watching our baby girl suffer the most torturous pain with no help other than pain relief and antibiotics and walking her up and down as much as we could and trying to stop her collapsing. She was immediately treated by the vet for her colic as soon as the Hendra clearance came through and we are now treating the residual injuries and she is over the worst. We cannot believe she is still alive to be honest.

This is obviously the short version of the story. We do not want anyone else to ever have to go through what we all just went through, particularly our beautiful gentle Jackie 🐾🐾🐾❤

**It is not the veterinarians who are responsible for cases like this, it is the government's Hendra Virus Infection Prevention Advice, Biosecurity Queensland Guidelines and the WHS prosecutions of veterinarians who have effectively had their hands tied.**

As you will see from the original post the veterinarians obviously did attend to the horse, provide immediate welfare and pain relief and take an exclusion test. Given the details of the current prosecutions it is impossible to veterinarians to do more without fear of prosecution.



# EQUINE VETERINARY SERVICES

Dr. John Barnwell M. V. B.

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31 Luck Road, Hodgsonvale, Queensland, 4352

ABN 90669022629

2<sup>nd</sup> February 2016

Agriculture and Environment Committee  
Parliament House  
George Street  
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Carol Smith  
31 Luck Road  
Hodgsonvale  
Queensland

Phone: 07 3553 6662

Phone: 07 4630 9983

Fax: 07 3553 6699

Mobile: 0400310896

Email: [aec@parliament.qld.gov.au](mailto:aec@parliament.qld.gov.au)

email: [barnwellcarol@gmail.com](mailto:barnwellcarol@gmail.com)

## Thoughts and Considerations

1. Hendra is not going to go away. In fact, current research suggests that the incidence of 'spill over of the virus' from bats to horses and potentially humans is likely to increase as development along the eastern seaboard reduces the bats natural habitats, forcing an ever increasing overlap of bats cohabiting with horses and humans in urban areas.
2. Current Biosecurity Queensland Guidelines are impossible to implement in practical field situations without significantly increasing the risk to the veterinarian's own workplace health and safety and without exposing them to unlimited liability for a situation they have virtually no control over. Veterinarians are not responsible for Hendra virus, nor should they be responsible for owners that won't vaccinate their horses. Further, the current guidelines pose enormous welfare issues for horses.
3. Looking into the future, the government will be entirely reliant on the veterinary profession to control and manage Hendra cases yet the current workplace Health and Safety prosecutions are totally alienating vast numbers of the profession who have been doing their best to cope with a difficult and rapidly changing situation at the coal face of Hendra virus. One of those being prosecuted was veterinarian to the Australian Olympic Show Jumping Team and is a highly respected member of the profession. "If this can happen to someone like that it could happen to anyone".
4. Consequent to the prosecutions, large numbers of equine veterinarians are either leaving the profession or resorting to treating vaccinated horses only. The government needs to be aware that this haemorrhage of qualified and experienced personal will become a flood if the prosecutions are allowed to proceed and the veterinarians are found to be guilty in circumstances largely beyond their control.
5. This situation is leading to a crisis with in the equine veterinary profession and, as a direct result, a crisis with in the ENTIRE equine industry in Queensland. The government needs to show leadership at this time and take action to reverse the current situation.

Office/Accounts: 07 4630 9983

Fax: 07 4630 9984

[www.equineveterinaryservices.com.au](http://www.equineveterinaryservices.com.au)

Email: [admin@equineveterinaryservices.com.au](mailto:admin@equineveterinaryservices.com.au)

## Suggested way forward

6. The fact that the government is even holding this inquiry demonstrates the **level of confusion** that exists over the interpretation of the current Biosecurity Queensland Guidelines and the best way to **manage the unforeseen consequences** that this legislation has brought about. In recognition of this, the government needs to urgently regain the trust of the veterinary profession by immediately withdrawing the prosecutions against the three veterinarians.
7. Moving forward I believe the very best way to control Hendra virus would be to introduce a mandatory vaccination policy for all horses living in or entering a high risk Hendra post code.

The Equine Veterinary Association has been advised that it is not possible to introduce mandatory vaccination for horses because the government can't even insist on mandatory vaccination for children. **This argument does not hold up to proper scrutiny.** Of course, no government can dictate policy relating to the life of a child, but almost every country around the world where Rabies is endemic has a mandatory vaccination policy in place for dogs. This is in order to **protect human lives** and surely the life of person should always take precedence over that of a horse!

8. If the government is not prepared to introduce mandatory vaccination for all horses in high risk areas, it still needs to consider its obligations to adequately protect other members of the public. Therefore it needs to urgently introduce mandatory vaccination for all horses that enter a public space or attend events such as the races, a show, an endurance ride, or horse sales in high risk post codes. An unvaccinated horse poses a threat not only to itself and its owner but also to any other in contact personal or horse.

It is totally unrealistic to imagine that the veterinary profession can adequately control situations like these with the use of PPE only and then also be held responsible and indeed liable for any potential outcomes given that the majority of the associated risks are totally outside their control.

Under the current guidelines, one horse with respiratory signs and a temperature at the Magic Millions Sales should close the whole sale down, placing all the horses into 'quarantine' until an exclusion test result has been returned. This would provide disastrous publicity for Queensland.

9. Should the government not wish to introduce any mandatory vaccination policies, it must make a very clear and unequivocal decision that the liability for any risk associated with Hendra lies with the owners of unvaccinated horses and not with the veterinary profession. If they fail to do this the equine veterinary industry in Queensland is in danger of a total collapse, and it will take down the wonderful, diverse and valuable equine industry with it.

*Carol Smith*

Carol Smith



# EQUINE VETERINARY SERVICES

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31 Luck Road, Hodgsonvale, Queensland, 4352

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Agriculture and Environment Committee  
Parliament House  
George Street  
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Carol Smith  
31 Luck Road  
Hodgsonvale  
Queensland

Phone: 07 3553 6662  
Fax: 07 3553 6699  
Email: [aec@parliament.qld.gov.au](mailto:aec@parliament.qld.gov.au)

Phone: 07 4630 9983  
Mobile: 0400310896  
email: [barnwellcarol@gmail.com](mailto:barnwellcarol@gmail.com)

Dear Committee

I would like to make a submission to the inquiry into **Hendra virus (HeV) Equivacc vaccine and its use by veterinary surgeons in Queensland.**

I am the practice manager (responsible for workplace health and safety) for Equine Veterinary Services. I have a degree in veterinary science and have worked in the veterinary industry for 34 years.

This submission has been written to specifically address, in detail, the requirement of the committee to consider:

'Who bears the risk of HeV infection and who incurs the costs and receives the benefits from each risk mitigation option.'

Please find attached my risk/cost analysis for submission to the committee.

Thank you in advance for the time taken to give my submission your full consideration,

Yours faithfully,

Carol Smith B.Vet.Med



## WHO BEARS THE RISK OF HEV INFECTION AND WHO INCURS THE COST AND RECIEVES THE BENEFITS FROM EACH RISK MITIGATION OPTION

### Considerations:

- The main objective is to reduce or eliminate the risk of any human contracting and potentially dying from Hendra virus.
- A secondary but also important objective is to reduce the number of horses dying from this fatal disease.
- The risk of spill over of disease from bats to humans is on the rise as normal bat habitat is lost and bat/ horse/human interaction increases in urban areas.
- There is no evidence of bats transferring Hendra directly to humans; **owners keeping horses in Hendra areas CREATE the risk.**
- A vaccine exists that has the potential to break the bat/horse/ human transmission and thus **eliminate the risk.**
- **Veterinarians have no control over owners who fail to implement Hendra virus risk mitigation strategies on their property** - such as Hendra vaccination, providing covered food and water, not keeping horses under flowering trees, securing appropriate PPE to use when handling a sick horse prior to the vets arrival. Yet when a veterinarian attends a sick horse **that has already contracted Hendra virus**, the veterinarian is **deemed responsible** for the owner being exposed to Hendra virus regardless of all the risks the owner may have taken to date.
- Much like tick control legislation vaccination could be mandated for horse entering or living in high risk Hendra post codes only (see attached map).
- Vaccination can offer a simple, clear cut, **easy to interpret solution** to Hendra virus risk management, with very limited risk.

### Risk Assessment:

#### **A) THE USE OF VACCINATION (preferably mandatory so uptake is wide spread) TO MANAGE THE RISK OF HENRA**

	Owners	Veterinarians	Horses	Equine Veterinary Profession	Horse Owing Community	State of Queensland
<b>RISK</b>	<p>Virtually eliminated</p> <p>Owners are protected against the risk of contracting the fatal disease, Hendra , when caring for their horses.</p> <p>There is a very small risk that one of their horses may have a reaction to the vaccination.</p>	<p>Virtually eliminated</p> <p>Veterinarians are protected against the risk of contracting the fatal disease, Hendra, when treating sick horses on a daily basis.</p> <p>They also face a markedly reduced risk from the need to work in full PPE to examine sick horses, which is dangerous.</p>	<p>Virtually eliminated</p> <p>There is small risk that a few horses will react to the vaccine. All horses will be protected against a fatal disease.</p> <p>There will be no welfare issues with delayed treatment for horses while an exclusion test is carried out.</p>	<p>Virtually eliminated</p> <p>The veterinary profession will be able to retain strong numbers of equine veterinarians who can confidently do their job without fear of exposure to a lethal virus, injury from working in full PPE and/or prosecution.</p>	<p>Virtually eliminated</p> <p>Cancellation of equine events for lack of an ‘on duty’ vet will cease.</p> <p>Equine events will continue to be held because veterinarians will no longer be faced with unlimited liability and will therefore be prepared to be ‘on duty’ at such events.</p>	<p>Virtually eliminated</p> <p>Wide spread vaccination will virtually eliminate the risk of human Hendra cases. State veterinarians will face reduced risk with a markedly reduced number of positive Hendra cases. The equine industry will no longer be threatened by this virus and will remain competitive with other states.</p>

	Owners	Veterinarians	Horses	Equine Veterinary Profession	Horse Owning Community	State of Queensland
<b>BENEFIT</b>	<p>Owners will be protected against Hendra virus. They will be assured that <b>their veterinarian will attend</b> their sick horses and they <b>will not face the increased risk</b> of attempting to treat an unvaccinated horse themselves. Their <b>horses will not suffer</b> while an exclusion test is being undertaken. After 01 July 2016 they will also benefit from <b>not having to pay (+/- \$250)</b> for the vet to perform an exclusion test before treating their sick horse.</p>	<p>Veterinarians will be protected against Hendra virus when treating sick horses. They will not have to risk their own personal safety by working in full PPE and they will no longer fear prosecution. They will benefit from being able to do their job safely, properly and immediately when called out to see sick horses.</p>	<p>Horses will be protected from contracting Hendra virus and will be able to receive prompt and appropriate treatment at all times. There will be no welfare issues for horses.</p> <p>Horses can be easily referred and moved to specialist centres without awaiting the results of an exclusion test.</p>	<p>Vets will feel safe and the profession will retain strong numbers of equine veterinarians because they can now do their job properly without fear of exposure to a lethal virus, injury from working in full PPE and/or prosecution.</p> <p>Specialist centres and the university teaching hospital will remain viable because they will be able to see a full and proper case load.</p>	<p>Owners will benefit from retaining a strong equine veterinary profession. Equine events involving large numbers of horses, owners and members of the public will continue to be held because veterinarians and event organisers will not be fearful of unlimited liability.</p> <p>There will be sufficient vets willing to work in Queensland to maintain the breeding and racing industries.</p>	<p>The public at large (including innocent bystanders -some of whom have already been exposed to Hendra virus) will be protected. The state will save \$\$ from a vastly reduced need for exclusion testing for this notifiable disease. Biosecurity costs in positive Hendra cases will also be reduced. There will be significant savings for Queensland Health from having to treat greatly reduced numbers of human exposures to Hendra virus.</p>
<b>COST</b>	<p>Each individual owner <b>(who creates the risk by owning a horse in a Hendra area)</b> will pay for vaccinating their own horses against Hendra, just as they pay to vaccinate against tetanus and strangles. The cost will be shared proportionately throughout the equine industry.</p>	<p>The cost price of the vaccine is slightly more than most other vaccines. However, most veterinarians are providing the vaccine to owners at a price that only just covers their costs, in an attempt to get as many horses as possible vaccinated.</p>				<p>A mandatory vaccination policy may be unpopular initially, but would rapidly be accepted as necessary. Everyone expects a dog from a foreign country to be vaccinated against rabies for similar reasons. The government has a duty of care towards all its citizens and innocent bystanders have already been exposed to Hendra virus.</p>

**B) THE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT VACCINATING WHEN MANAGING THE RISK OF HENDRA**

	<b>Owners</b>	<b>Veterinarians</b>	<b>Horses</b>	<b>Equine Veterinary Profession</b>	<b>Horse Owning Community</b>	<b>State of Queensland</b>
<b>RISK</b>	<p>Owners routinely place bridles into horses' mouths with no PPE on. They are at risk of contracting Hendra from their horses before symptoms of the disease even develop. They are at extreme risk when their horses become sick with Hendra even before a vet attends. This risk increases exponentially if a veterinarian won't attend because the vet is now fearful of Hendra virus, working in full PPE and prosecution. If a vet does not attend, owners may also face civil cases from third parties who come into contact with their Hendra positive, unvaccinated horse.</p>	<p>Those veterinarians that still treat unvaccinated horses face the <b>daily risk of being exposed to a fatal virus</b>. They also face the increased risk of working with horses in full PPE. They face the risk of PPE failure in uncontrollable field situations. They face the risk of prosecution if they fail to contain a Hendra positive case when they have no control over the owners risk mitigation measures. They also face massive open ended liability if they are vet on duty at an unvaccinated public event.</p>	<p>Horses face the constant risk of contracting Hendra virus, a preventable fatal disease. Any horse that develops antibodies will automatically be euthanased.</p> <p>Horses also face the risk of extreme suffering and even death if they cannot be treated before an exclusion test has been completed, whenever they get sick, even if they don't have Hendra virus.</p>	<p>The equine veterinary profession in Queensland is currently in crisis. Many veterinary practices are no longer treating horses. Others will treat vaccinated horses only. Veterinarians are leaving the industry, leaving the profession or leaving the state. Recruitment of veterinarians to work in high risk Hendra areas has become all but impossible since the WHS prosecutions. There is a very real risk that the equine veterinary profession in high risk Hendra areas will collapse. There will be no one left in the field to deal with positive Hendra cases.</p>	<p>The horse owning community is at risk of being left with vastly reduced veterinary support. Public events such as races, district shows, camp drafting, polo, polo-cross, endurance etc. are being cancelled for lack of veterinary support.</p> <p>The number of equine veterinarians remaining will not be able to provide the extensive services required by the large breeding and racing industry in Queensland.</p>	<p>Poor vaccination uptake is already posing a significant risk to the entire equine industry.</p> <p>The state risks having to deal with all suspected cases of Hendra virus without the support of private veterinarians some of whom will already only treat vaccinated horses.</p> <p>Unless biosecurity's state veterinarians attend to all sick unvaccinated horses, owners will treat them themselves and the number of potentially fatal exposures to this deadly virus will increase, at significant cost to Queensland Health</p>
<b>BENEFIT</b>	<p>Horse owners will benefit from not having to pay for the cost of the vaccination. They won't have to face the very small risk of a vaccine reaction.</p>	<p>No benefit</p>	<p>No benefit to horses other than avoiding the very small risk of a vaccine reaction</p>	<p>No benefit</p>	<p>No benefit The lack of vaccination coupled with the recent prosecutions is having an entirely negative effect on the wider equine community.</p>	<p>No benefit except a 'hands off' approach with an electorate who don't accept responsibility for the threat their horses pose to themselves, their vets and the industry.</p>

	Owners	Veterinarians	Horses	Equine Veterinary Profession	Horse Owning Community	State of Queensland
<b>COST</b>	<p>While the owner will save on the cost of vaccination they will pay in many other ways: Possibly with their own life, that of their horse or their veterinarian. They will pay as they watch their horses suffer for lack of a vet attending or treatment being given until an exclusion test has been completed. From July 2016 they will pay for all the time and PPE necessary to exclusion test their horse (\$250). They will also pay for increased treatment costs caused by this necessary delay.</p>	<p>Some veterinarians no longer treat unvaccinated horses at considerable financial loss. Others pay for the lack of vaccination by having to risk their lives, working in full PPE to treat sick unvaccinated horses and counter a fatal virus. They then go home to sleepless nights and untold worry in case they have contracted this deadly disease and in case they are going to be prosecuted.</p> <p><b>No vet does this by choice</b> but in an equine practice, if only 20% of clients vaccinate their horses the vets have to face the risk of Hendra, the dangers of working in full PPE and/or prosecution daily <b>or give up working in the industry.</b> Few new vets are entering the profession in Queensland.</p>	<p>Horses pay for not being vaccinated with their lives. They are also made to suffer extended delays in treatment when sick, as exclusion tests are carried out. In some cases horses are paying with their lives even when they don't have Hendra because, had they been vaccinated, prompt and appropriate treatment could have saved them.</p>	<p>The cost of owners not vaccinating their horses and then WHS holding veterinarians responsible for the risks these owners take has ALREADY had a very damaging effect on the industry. The only vets still treating unvaccinated horses are those that cannot afford not to because they have so much invested in their mostly equine practices.</p> <p>Vets free to change course, move on, or work elsewhere are doing so. There will be few 'new vets coming in' and the numbers of equine vets in Queensland will shrink gradually over time and significantly if the prosecutions are successful.</p>	<p>The horse owning community will pay a very heavy price. As there are fewer and fewer vets treating unvaccinated horses, the cost of veterinary services will increase significantly. In time there may not even be enough vets to adequately support a viable breeding and racing industry. Already clubs and event organisers are struggling to find vets who will be 'on duty' and events are being cancelled at a significant cost to the community.</p>	<p>The cost to Queensland if this situation is not resolved immediately is immeasurable. The equine veterinary profession is in danger of collapsing and taking the breeding and racing industry down with it. Jobs will be lost and the economy will shrink.</p> <p>With no vaccination policy in place, Biosecurity Queensland will be left to deal with potential Hendra virus cases themselves and many more human cases will eventuate.</p> <p>Without informed support owners may not recognise their potential exposure to Hendra virus until it's too late for timely access to treatment.</p> <p>Human fatalities will increase.</p>

**C) THE USE OF FULLY SUITED UP PPE TO MANAGE THE RISK OF HENDRA**

	<b>Owners</b>	<b>Veterinarians</b>	<b>Horses</b>	<b>Equine Veterinary Profession</b>	<b>Horse Owning Community</b>	<b>State of Queensland</b>
<b>RISK</b>	<p>Owners routinely place bridles into horses' mouths with no PPE at all and may be exposed to the Hendra virus in a non symptomatic horse. Once sick, <b>owners have often already been exposed to Hendra before the veterinarian arrives and PPE is applied.</b> The correct application and removal of PPE is vital to prevent a breach and is difficult to learn in just a few minutes. Sick horses in field conditions can be unpredictable and breaches in PPE are common place. Owners find it very hard not to touch or attempt to treat their sick and suffering horses whilst waiting for exclusion test results. They are at very high risk of breaching their veterinarian's advice.</p>	<p>Wearing full PPE to examine every sick unvaccinated horse where Hendra cannot be ruled out <b>significantly increases the risk of serious accident or injury for all equine veterinarians and is dangerous.</b> This risk is NOT in proportion to the risk that Hendra virus actually poses and is not something most vets are prepared to contemplate.</p> <p>Vets are left with no choice other than to risk their own health and safety by working in full PPE every day/ not wearing full PPE and risking prosecution OR keeping themselves safe by treating vaccinated horses only.</p>	<p>PPE does absolutely NOTHING to prevent a horse from dying from Hendra virus.</p> <p>PPE used as a control measure for Hendra virus is also leading to the risk of delayed treatment resulting in significant suffering and sometimes even death for many horses.</p>	<p>As long as owners don't vaccinate their horse in high risk Hendra areas, the veterinary profession will remain in crisis. The brain drain and lack of new recruitment into the profession will lead to a serious shortage of veterinary expertise and an associated collapse of all equine industries.</p>	<p>At equine sporting events there is always a high concentration of horses and people. Horses mix closely, share drinking troughs, are accommodated side by side and come into contact with many different people. The liability veterinarians face trying to manage Hendra in a situation like this with the use of PPE only is unlimited! This risk is leading to no 'on call vets' and shows being cancelled.</p> <p>A positive Hendra case, at an unvaccinated event would not only affect the owners of the sick horse but all other competitors who would have their unvaccinated horses quarantined for weeks until the whole outbreak had been contained.</p>	<p><b>Mandating that veterinarians must work in full PPE to control Hendra virus, when the risk of serious accident or injury to the veterinarian massively outweighs the threat of Hendra virus leaves the government exposed to possible class action law suits from injured veterinarians and/or their families in the event of multiple accidents or deaths.</b></p> <p>What is the equine industry worth to the state of Queensland?</p> <p>That is the size of the risk we all face. PPE alone is never going to cover this risk.</p>

	Owners	Veterinarians	Horses	Equine Veterinary Profession	Horse Owning Community	State of Queensland
<b>BENEFIT</b>	<p>The use of full PPE to combat the threat of Hendra offers minimum protection to owners.</p> <p>The thought that vets will still examine their sick horses dressed in full PPE has provided a <b>false sense of security</b> to owners who don't vaccinate their horses.</p> <p><b>In reality, the owners are still at risk of contracting Hendra from their own horses.</b></p> <p>Further, as many vets will no longer treat unvaccinated horses for fear of their lives, safety and prosecution, even more owners are at even more risk as they attempt to treat their own unvaccinated sick horses usually without any PPE.</p>	<p>The use of <u>full</u> PPE for isolated high risk or confirmed case of Hendra virus is a procedure that all vets are comfortable with.</p> <p>They recognise both the benefits PPE provides AND the limitations associated with its use.</p> <p>The benefit does not outweigh the risks associated with wide spread use of PPE in every potential Hendra case.</p>	<p>PPE provides absolutely no benefit to horses and most of them are absolutely terrified of it.</p>	<p>There is no benefit to the veterinary profession of working in full PPE when compared to working with vaccinated horses.</p> <p>Working in full PPE is dangerous and the profession is not embracing this policy, preferring to look towards treating vaccinated horses only instead.</p>	<p>PPE can provide very limited benefit towards controlling the risks associated with Hendra, in the wider horse owning community as evidenced by the number of human exposures that have occurred despite its current recommended use in field conditions.</p> <p>PPE also does little to reduce all the potential liability a veterinarian may face at larger community events. There is no benefit to proposing the use of PPE over vaccination at community events as vets will not attend and cancelation will still occur.</p>	<p>By not introducing a mandatory Hendra vaccination policy and insisting private veterinarians risk their lives using full PPE instead to manage the disease, <b>the government has side stepped its obligations to adequately control a fatal notifiable disease.</b> If third world countries can manage Rabies with mandatory vaccination programs, why can't Queensland manage Hendra the same way and keep everyone safe?</p> <p>The government, who holds all the power to get people to vaccinate, has absolved itself of the responsibility to manage the risk of Hendra virus, by placing unlimited and untenable risk and liability on the shoulders of a small number of equine veterinarians who have no powers to effectively control this disease. The current approach has the potential to destroy the whole equine industry.</p>

	Owners	Veterinarians	Horses	Equine Veterinary Profession	Horse Owning Community	State of Queensland
<b>COST</b>	<p>Until July 2016 the government will subsidise the cost of PPE to the tune of \$250. From July 2016 the client will be responsible for all the costs (time, PPE, training, increased) associated with obtaining Hendra exclusion test samples. These costs will be added on top of any standard consultation fee and any treatment given in the event of a negative test.</p> <p>NB it is a recognised fact that the delay in treatment caused by exclusion testing is also leading to increased treatment costs for most owners as their horses deteriorate significantly in the time the test takes.</p>	<p>Vets believe that their life is worth more than the cost of a vaccination.</p> <p>Many vets have paid a huge price for the governments PPE policy because, when unable to safely implement it, they have chosen to treat vaccinated horses only instead. This has lost them many clients and reduced the total number of horses they can treat, severely damaging their practices.</p> <p>Veterinarians taking the risk to still treating unvaccinated horses are operating businesses and not charities and all costs associated with the use of PPE will be passed on to the owners.</p>	<p>Horses will pay for the choice to use PPE over vaccination with their health. They will not be protected against Hendra virus, a fatal disease, and may suffer significantly and perhaps even die if they ever get sick.</p>	<p>The veterinary profession in Queensland has already been significantly damaged by the PPE over vaccination policy. If the policy remains unchanged it will be damaged even further, as many vets leave the profession.</p>	<p>The horse owning community is paying the price of the PPE only policy, because PPE cannot contain the risk associated with unvaccinated horses at events. With unlimited liability vets won't attend and shows are being cancelled, with significant knock on effects</p> <p><b>As veterinary numbers decline further veterinary fees and charges will increase significantly right across the equine industry and make Queensland uncompetitive with most other states.</b></p>	<p><b>In order to remain viable the equine industry needs veterinarians.</b> In order to retain good vets the equine industry needs to provide them with a safe working environment. Risking their lives, their safety and fearing prosecution fails to provide a good working environment. The cost to Queensland is the loss of its equine vets and damage to the whole industry.</p> <p>In addition the state must pay for the ongoing costs of exclusion testing, the ongoing costs for biosecurity and quarantine in the event of a much higher number of Hendra positive cases.</p> <p>Queensland Health will pay for the increased costs associated with increased numbers of human Hendra exposures.</p>



## EQUINE VETERINARY SERVICES

Dr. John Barnwell M. V. B.

Dr. Lachlan Perkins B.V.Sc.

Dr. Ayla Hunt B.V.Sc.

Dr. Carol Smith B.Vet.Med.

31 Luck Road, Hodgsonvale, Queensland, 4352

ABN 90669022629

Agriculture and Environment Committee  
Parliament House  
George Street  
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Phone: 07 3553 6662  
Fax: 07 3553 6699  
Email: [aec@parliament.qld.gov.au](mailto:aec@parliament.qld.gov.au)

Carol Smith  
31 Luck Road  
Hodgsonvale  
Queensland

Phone: 07 4630 9983  
Mobile: 0400310896  
email: [barnwellcarol@gmail.com](mailto:barnwellcarol@gmail.com)

Dear Committee

On Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2016 I attended the parliamentary briefing for the inquiry into the Hendra virus vaccine and its use by veterinarians in Queensland. At the briefing the EVA showed a short video that demonstrated to the committee what working in fully suited up PPE actually entailed.

I would like to submit supporting scientifically researched and documented evidence that supports the equine veterinary professions contention that working with horses under the best of condition is a dangerous occupation and that the current requirement (being enforced through prosecution) for veterinarians to work in full PPE to examine every sick horse that 'could possibly have Hendra' is close to impossible to adopt and has put veterinarians into an untenable position where many have been forced to risk their own personal safety, risk prosecution or treat vaccinated horses only.

<http://www.beva.org.uk/news-and-events/news/view/641>

Printed details of this link are attached to this letter.

Once again I would like to thank the committee for the attention that they are giving to this matter and hope that they can come up with a solution that protects both owners and veterinarians from the threat of Hendra virus and ensures a stable and prosperous future for the equine industry in Queensland,

Yours sincerely,

Carol Smith



# Equine vets have the highest injury risk of all civilian professions



Released on 11/09/2014

Being a horse vet in the UK appears to carry the highest risk of injury of any civilian occupation in the UK, according to the results of the first ever survey on injuries within the profession. This study, commissioned by the British Equine Veterinary Association (BEVA) and conducted by leading medical professionals at the Institute of Health and Wellbeing and the School of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Glasgow, has prompted BEVA to raise awareness of these risks within the equine industry and to look at ways of making equine veterinary practice safer.

Previously, largely anecdotal information suggested that veterinary practitioners involved in equine work frequently sustain injuries as part of their work with horses, but the prevalence and type of injury have never been quantified in the UK. It is widely thought that some vets have to give up equine work due to a work-related injury and whilst very occasionally fatalities have happened, these may be inconsistently documented.

Former President of BEVA, Keith Chandler, outlined further: "We were coming across reports that vets were being injured, often seriously and occasionally fatally, when dealing with their patients. As a result, we commissioned this study to quantify and qualify the risks, which our members were facing whilst pursuing their professional career. It is a sad irony that some vets are being seriously injured in their efforts to protect the health of horses."

A total of 620 equine vets completed a work-related injuries questionnaire between September and November 2013. The results of the study indicated that an equine vet could expect to sustain between seven and eight work-related injuries that impeded them from practicing, during a 30-year working life. Data available from the Health and Safety Executive suggest that vets working in equine practice in the UK, thus sustain a very high number of injuries compared to other civilian occupations, including those working in the construction industry, prison service and the fire brigade.

Participants were asked to describe their worst-ever injury. Most were described as bruising, fracture and laceration, with the most common site of injury being the leg (29%), followed by the head (23%). The main cause of injury was a kick with a hind limb (49%), followed by strike with a fore limb (11%), followed by crush injury (5%). Nearly a quarter of these reported injuries required hospital admission and notably, 7% resulted in loss of consciousness.

Keith Chandler said: "We were shocked to discover the extent of the injuries sustained. Of greatest concern is the number of vets who suffered head injuries and unconsciousness. These injuries appeared to be more common when certain procedures were being performed, such as endoscopy of the upper respiratory tract, when vets are often only partly sighted while using examination equipment, or during wound management and bandage-changes, where vets are often crouched-down for long periods, next to the patient."

Thirty eight percent of the 'worst' injuries occurred when the vet was working with a 'pleasure' horse and most frequently (48% of all responses) the horse handler was the owner or the client at the time of the injury. Whilst the number of laypersons or handlers injured at the same time was low, Tim Parkin, vet and lead researcher, pointed out: "This work should act as a wake up call to all involved in the training, employment and engagement of equine vets. The risks associated with handling and working with horses should be the primary consideration for equine vets and horses owners alike, every time a horse is examined or treated. In addition, the experience of the horse handler should be considered when undertaking riskier procedures."

David Mountford, Chief Executive of BEVA continued: "The results are very concerning and justify a careful prospective scientific quantification of the risks. In the short term, knowledge of these risks allows us to better inform all vets who work with horses. In turn vets will be able to inform horse owners, horse-keepers and trainers of the risks, and this may provide justification for having trained assistance on-hand or the more extensive use of sedative drugs in practice, potentially reducing the risk of injury."

The British Equine Veterinary Association will now look to work with the Health and Safety Executive, Veterinary Schools, large employers of vets in the UK and our members to help develop policies to mitigate the risk of serious injury for vets working with horses."

[Link - Estimates of the number of injuries per 100,000 employed per year from the Labour Force Survey \(LFS\) and Health and Safety Executive \(HSE\) Table](#)

Table 7. Estimates of the number of injuries per 100,000 employed per year from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

Occupation	Source of injury data			
	* LFS injury survey (7 yr average)	HSE <sup>†</sup> reported divided by LFS data on number employed in that occupation	Glasgow study (if 620 respondents representative of rest of profession)	Glasgow study (if 620 respondents NOT representative i.e. all other equine vets sustained no injuries at all)
	<b>Injuries per 100,000 in employment per year</b>			
Equine Veterinarian			26452 (164 <sup>v</sup> in 620)	5467 (164 <sup>v</sup> in 3k)
Prison Service (below principal officer)	10,760	3576 (1359 in 38k)		
Police (sergeant and below)	8,700	1583 (2628 in 166k)		
Welding, metal formers and related trades	6,980	855 (735 in 86k)		
Skilled construction workers	4,760	995 (8278 in 832k)		
Construction operatives (road and rail)	4,630	995 (8278 in 832k)		
Farm worker	4,620	432 (294 in 68k)		
Fire Service (watch manager and below)	4,610	2379 (928 in 39k)		
Farmer	4,450	35 (59 in 167k)		
Elementary construction occupations	4,230	995 (8278 in 832k)		
Ship builders and repairers	NA	2258 (271 in 12k)		
Forestry workers	NA	1490 (149 in 10k)		
Scaffolders, staggers and riggers	NA	1116 (357 in 32k)		
Smiths and Forge workers	NA	300 (18 in 6k)		

\* Labour Force Survey data (actively acquired annually). † HSE RIDDOR (Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations) reported data (passively acquired). Calculated as number of reported injuries (HSE) divided by estimates of the number employed within each occupation (LFS). <sup>v</sup>The estimate of 164 injuries in a year is derived by dividing the total number of injuries reported (2,382) by the average number of years worked by respondents to the survey (14.5yrs)