

Queensland Parliament Inquiry to Hendra Vaccine

To whom this may concern,

Detailed below is my submission for the Hendra virus inquiry.

I am in full support of the vaccination and proactively recommend it however I am not satisfied with the general consensus (of the public including well established equine personal) that vets are "forcing people to vaccinate", "it is black mailing", "refusing to see horses" and/or "falsely over vaccinating horses".

I have worked as an equine veterinary nurse in several Hendra at risk areas for the past 6 years and have personally been involved with a positive Hendra case having been the nurse for the veterinarian involved. From my experience and knowledge I believe that it is of utmost importance for horses to be vaccinated against this potentially fatal disease and have outlined the importance of why below;

The most important reason being that (so far) Hendra virus has only been reported in humans via transmission from a horse. Therefore, if we can stop the virus at the horses (the only know transmission path to humans) then essentially we are completely preventing the disease being contracted by humans. As stated by Queensland Health and Biosecurity the *Hendra Vaccination of horses as the single most effective way to prevent Hendra virus in horses and humans*. Not only are we protecting our beloved equine partners but at the same time essentially protecting ourselves at the same time. Pretty simple really?

There is also the fact of work place health and safety. The men and women of the equine industry whom put their own lives at risk day in and day out, at what cost? How can we say that it is okay for people to be potentially exposed to such a disease because someone else "doesn't want to vaccinate" or "doesn't believe in vaccinations". This becomes worse for the people involved (especially Veterinarians attending sick horses); when not only are they at risk of contracting the actual disease **but** also from prosecution from WPHS and/or other organisations; as it is their responsibility to ensure the health and safety of themselves and ALL others. The WHS act 2011 states that "a person conducting a business or undertaking must ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that the health and safety of other persons is not put at risk from work carried out as part of the conduct of the business or undertaking". This meaning that if an unvaccinated horse becomes ill and a veterinarian attends, they are responsible and liable for EVERYTHING. Unfair right? They chose not to vaccinate and now vets are choosing not to attend (but are being abused for it).

Having experienced this first hand with a work colleague of mine this scenario is not ideal for anyone involved. Veterinarians and others will quickly become discouraged from working in Queensland or with horses at all; driving the most talented and motivated equine veterinarians (and others) away to areas unaffected by the virus. With this in mind equine veterinarians are faced with this day in and day out and have the fear of being prosecuted in the back of their mind; causing stress and other problems in individuals faced with seeing unvaccinated horses – not what they signed up for.

The most common reason not to vaccinate I hear in my experience is first the cost and second the fear of reaction.

To start with, the cost; I believe is very minimal when compared with the cost of keeping a horse. People will spend hundreds on shoes every 8 weeks and weekly feeds not to mention the farrier, chiro and tack/equipment costs. Therefore I believe this excuse is uncalled for and irrelevant, if you can't afford to vaccinate you can't afford to call a vet when your horse is sick.

However in saying that I do believe that this could be alleviated with government subsidies- as surely it would be in the governments interests to help protect every citizen from this virus?

In regards to the fear of reactions I simply believe that the chance and/or consequences of a reaction to the vaccine FAR out weighs the consequences of transmitting the disease let alone NOT being able to get immediate (if any) treatment from a veterinarian. Reactions in my experience are very minimal and it is the risk you have to take to ensure the safety of your horse, yourself and ANYONE whom may come into contact with YOUR horse; whether it be a passer by, the farrier or your neighbour. As hard as it is for me to say this; since when is a horses life more valuable than a human beings and how can YOU put a value on someone else's life? What if it was your child patting the pony at the local pony rides? Would you want to know that they are safe? Would you be able to sleep at night knowing that because someone was too scared to vaccinate or couldn't afford to vaccinate their pony that is the SOLE reason the child transmitted the disease?

The parliament should also take into consideration the recent knowledge that horses that have been titer tested and are coming back with higher than expected results - asking the question that the vaccine can be stretched out to a year? This would dramatically improve the use of the vaccine and regain the trust in the veterinarians.

In conclusion, I am in full support of the vaccination and proactively recommend it however I am not satisfied with the general consensus (of the public including well established equine personal) that vets are "forcing people to vaccinate", "it is black mailing", and/or "falsely over vaccinating horses". Therefore I strongly believe the parliament must take this into consideration and rectify any negative impacts on the equine veterinarian medicine industry and ensure that when implemented the mandatory vaccination rules are specified in detail and DO NOT leave the option for the public to potentially abuse and blame the veterinarians.

I hope this inquiry not only investigates the reasons to vaccinate but also investigates the Veterinarians role in this to help rebuild all equine veterinarians reputation. (Ie. Veterinarians want to vaccinate to prevent Hendra and to be able to treat Hendra like symptomatic horses knowing full well that they are not at risk of Hendra- it's not for the money, it's not a conspiracy to black mail, it's not about forcing people). I would like to also reiterate that mandatory vaccination rules should be implied as necessary (which may be a large grey area) and to eligible horses only, so ultimately; across all events that the horse may come in contact with the public (racing, eventing, pony club), for any horse receiving veterinary treatment (ie Not vac NO SEE – if the horse is not vaccinated the Veterinarian DOES NOT have to attend) and at any agistment (or like wise) establishment

There must be clause in the mandatory vaccination scheme to outline the importance of ELIGIBLE horses; eg. There may be a legitimate reason not to vaccinate for example eg. a mare in the last trimester or horse receiving life saving chemo therapy but this **Must** be at the Veterinarians discretion and there must be a governing body monitoring this. These horses would NOT be able to receive veterinary treatment however (the risk) nor attend any of the establishments mentioned above. The government should be working closely with veterinarians and there should be government employed veterinarians at the for front dealing with the unvaccinated horses/ testing etc.

I currently work in a veterinary hospital where the Hendra Policy is No vac no see – which ensures my safety and the safety of my colleagues clients and anyone who comes onto the property. Due to the long incubation period of Hendra virus it was a no brainer to make sure that any horse on the property was fully vaccinated before entering and the policy therefore complies with WPHS

recommendations. The policy also ensures that no unvaccinated sick horses are seen to as the veterinarian attending is liable and therefore at risk of not only the disease but prosecution (mentioned earlier) and as the WPHS / biosecurity states that "if you cannot rule Hendra out you have to rule it in" any unvaccinated horse potentially has Hendra. I also own my own horse whom is fully covered and is aggested at a property that only allows vaccinated horse. This is most important to me to know that my own horse will never be in contact with unvaccinated horses and although he is covered; I do not have to worry about the disease being anywhere near my horse or my self

Thank you for your time and I look forward to seeing what results from the inquiry.

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