



WARWICK VETERINARY CLINIC
Warwick / Allora / Clifton
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21 April 2016

The Agriculture and Environment Committee Hendra Vaccine Inquiry
Parliament House
Brisbane
Queensland 4000

By email: aec@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear AEC Committee Members,

RE: Submission to the Qld Parliament's Hendra virus Vaccine Inquiry

I am a mixed animal veterinarian working on the Darling Downs. My company which has operated since 1949 employs four veterinarians and another seven lay staff. We perform in clinic and ambulatory veterinary work for approximately 1500 active clients, with over 10,000 transactions conducted annually. The equine portion of the practice is approximately 25%.

In addition to treating routine equine work such as cuts, colic's, and stitch ups we carry out a large amount of reproductive work in local studs on mares from all areas of Queensland. The practice is the attending vet the Warwick Turf Club eight race meetings annually as well as the Warwick Polocrosse and Warwick Gold Cup Campdraft events; both of which host over 500 and 1000 horses at their events.

The equine industry called for the vaccine prior to 2012 but since its introduction in December that year there has been slow uptake in both the pleasure and performance horse sectors generally <http://www.warwickdailynews.com.au/news/hendra-virus-cases-increase-concerns/895162/>.

I have promoted the need to vaccinate horses against Hendra virus actively through the business and the local newspaper (<http://www.warwickdailynews.com.au/news/vaccinate-for-hendra-virus/1760462/>), with little response.

Since its release, we have only used 650 doses. The adverse reaction rate has been low with only 2 horses (or 0.30%) requiring a revisit for a sore neck. These horses were given anti-inflammatories and made an uneventful recovery. The cost in my clinic is \$94 a dose (with an additional \$15 for a microchip to allow for permanent record keeping).

The disease is impossible to identify and hard to predict. As veterinarians we are often placed in a difficult position to handle an unpredictable large animal, an uninformed and emotional owner and in working conditions that are less than ideal (wind, darkness, rain, heat). Whilst some measure of protective equipment (PPE) is used, the level that is required in the current guidelines only adds to the problem of workplace safety rather than minimizing risk.

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LOCAL VETS SINCE 1949

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I have no faith in the biosecurity plans of event organisers as they only give a false sense of security to event organisers and offer no protection for the horse against the disease. As yet, I have never seen an audit process carried out on a biosecurity plan to date.

In summary, I would like this committee to make the following recommendations:

- a. That vaccination against Hendra virus is the single most important way to reduce the risk to Hendra virus.
- b. All horse owners should be encouraged to use the vaccine to protect their horse, themselves and the public
- c. Vaccination for Hendra at events like Warwick Rodeo, Polocrosse and Warwick Race day should be made mandatory for workplace safety.
- d. Governments should support clubs which make the decision to only allow vaccinated horses to compete, possibly by reviewing the way grant money is handed to horse clubs favouring equine events which mandate vaccination as it is an important public benefit
- e. That the government should identify that the *Guidelines for veterinarians handling potential Hendra virus infection in horses Version 5.0* are too perceptive in a field setting and review to the impracticalities of the guidelines in veterinary practice
- f. That Hendra virus protection is a shared responsibility between the horse owner and the veterinarian. Veterinarians should not wear all the WHS obligations in a Hendra investigation as it is impossible to control an emotive horse owner, a large unpredictable horse in uncontrollable environmental conditions.
- g. A cultural change in the horse industry is needed to address the poor biosecurity and hygiene awareness of the horse owner in general. More government resources are needed to educate the horse owning public about the risks to Hendra virus and methods to mitigate this risk.

Regards,

Chris Reardon

VSB 2776