

15th April 2016

Research Director
Agriculture and Environment Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000

RE: Hendra virus (HeV) EquiVacc[®] vaccine and its use by veterinary surgeons in Queensland

This submission relates to the following from the Terms of Reference.

In undertaking the inquiry, the committee is required to consider:

3. who bears the risks of HeV infection and who incurs the costs and receives the benefits from each risk mitigation option;
4. whether the guidelines/procedures required for veterinarians attending horses that are not vaccinated against HeV are proportionate to the consequences;
5. impacts on the equine industry and the economy arising from veterinarians applying a policy not to treat unvaccinated horses; and
6. the impact of Workplace Health and Safety actions on the decision by veterinarians not to attend unvaccinated horses and results of previous Workplace Health and Safety HeV investigations where there have been human infections.

Guild Insurance has been working in partnership with the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) and Equine Veterinarians Australia (EVA) for over 20 years. We're the recommended insurer for their members, providing Liability and Business insurance to veterinarians.

Guild provides Professional Indemnity and Liability cover for infectious and/or transmissible diseases. Our insureds are covered for allegations, legal defence costs and the financial loss of a breach of professional duty from a Hendra virus related incident. However if a veterinarian practice is closed following the outbreak of a Hendra virus incident, Business Interruption cover for loss of profits, wages, rent and other fixed business expenses is not available.

Whilst insurance is a vital tool for assisting veterinarians to mitigate their financial risks, we recognise that some risks can't be managed with insurance. This includes a veterinarian being infected with a potentially fatal virus, stress suffered when defending allegations of professional negligence following civil proceedings, an investigation by the registration board or other statutory authority and reputation damage following such action. Guild actively promotes the effective management of risks, including strategies which reduce the likelihood of an event occurring in the first place. Guild works closely with the AVA and EVA to provide our insureds comprehensive risk management resources and information to assist them with understanding and reducing their risks.

Through our unique partnership with the veterinary industry, Guild understands the Hendra virus (HeV) EquiVacc® vaccine to be the single most effective way of reducing the risk of Hendra virus infection in horses. It provides a work health and safety and public health benefit. We understand that the vaccination is strongly encouraged by the Queensland government as well as the majority of practicing veterinarians. In keeping with Guild's commitment to risk management, we are in favour of all horses in Hendra virus prone areas to be vaccinated against the virus.

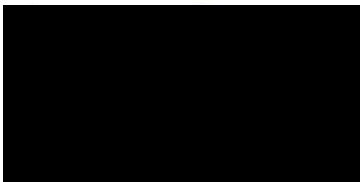
Our insured veterinarians have expressed to us their many challenges when treating horses that aren't vaccinated. Prior to testing, there is no single clear sign that a horse may be infected with Hendra virus. Many of the signs are also signs of other illnesses and conditions. Therefore veterinarians need to approach any unvaccinated horse showing any of the recognised signs as though it has the virus. The requirements on veterinarians in these cases are, whilst understandable, very cumbersome and difficult to effectively implement in the field.

When a veterinarian detects signs of a potential Hendra virus infection, they make significant effort to create a safe working environment for themselves and others who may have come into contact with the horse, such as its owner. Whilst veterinarians understand the need to create this safe working environment, meeting these requirements can also create additional risks. The Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) that veterinarians are required to wear can frighten horses. It can also limit a veterinarian's vision and sense of touch. Working with such a large animal will always carry some risk but unfortunately PPE can increase this risk. PPE also creates a health and safety risk on occasions for veterinarians due to the heat created inside the suits. Wearing these in warmer climates, such as northern Queensland, is challenging. If more horses

were vaccinated, veterinarians wouldn't be placed in situations where they need to wear PPE as often, therefore avoiding the additional risks and improving the standard of treatment that can be provided.

Whilst the likelihood of a horse being infected with Hendra virus may be low, the consequences for humans who come into contact with an infected horse are potentially fatal. For this reason, whilst veterinarians are waiting for test results to confirm or deny the presence of Hendra virus in a horse, they aren't able to treat the horse for the symptoms being shown. This period of uncertainty lasts for a few hours to a few days. In the majority of cases, Hendra tests results are negative. Yet by this time treatment for the horse's actual condition has been delayed, possibly causing further pain and an exacerbation of the horse's condition. This creates a far from ideal working environment for a veterinarian who's primary focus is to care for and treat sick animals and can lead to complaints from clients. In vaccinated horses, the delay in treatment is avoided.

Guild Insurance understands that there is no simple and straightforward way to manage all risks linked to Hendra virus and that these risks can never be fully eliminated whilst the virus exists. However we believe that all risks, particularly those with potentially catastrophic outcomes, need to be managed in a way which will have the most successful outcome. We are of the firm belief that the most successful mitigation strategy for reducing the risk of humans and horses being infected with Hendra virus is to enforce the mandatory vaccination of all horses in Hendra prone areas.



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