

QUESTION ON NOTICE
No. 1231
Asked on 15 September 2009

MS JARRATT asked the Minister for Primary Industries, Fisheries and Rural and Regional Queensland (MR MULHERIN)–

QUESTION:

Will the Minister advise what measures horse owners can take to minimise the risk to their animals from the Hendra Virus?

ANSWER:

Hendra virus is a rare disease of horses and humans. Since 1994 when it was first identified, there have been 13 incidents of Hendra virus disease, affecting approximately 45 horses and seven humans. Research into Hendra virus has shown that flying foxes are a reservoir for the disease and that they are the likely source of the virus for horses.

Hendra virus is regarded as a sporadic endemic disease, meaning that it is present in the Queensland environment and is unlikely to ever be eradicated. Strategies to minimise the risk of spillover of Hendra virus from flying foxes to horses will reduce the occurrence of the disease in horses, and ultimately in humans.

There are a number of simple biosecurity measures that can be taken by horse owners and carers to minimise the risk of spillover of Hendra virus from flying foxes to horses. They include:

- Do not place feed and water containers under trees, particularly if flying foxes are attracted to those trees.
- Place feed and water containers under cover if possible.
- If possible, remove horses from paddocks where flowering trees have resulted in a temporary surge in flying fox numbers. Return the horses after the trees have stopped flowering.
- If removal of horses from paddocks is not possible, try to temporarily remove horses during times of peak flying fox activity (usually at dusk and during the night).
- Do not use feed for horses that might be attractive to flying foxes if they are known to be in the area. Fruit and vegetables (for example, apples, carrots) or anything sweet (for example, molasses) may attract flying foxes.
- Where possible, provide enclosed shelters for horses to be located in at night.

These simple biosecurity strategies offer horse owners and carers options to reduce the risk of exposure of horses to flying foxes and the Hendra virus. All Queenslanders are encouraged to adopt similar precautionary principles wherever there may be a biosecurity risk.

In the longer term, biosecurity management plans for horse properties may include the planting of trees that are not attractive to flying foxes and design of day and night paddocks for horses to reduce exposure risk to flying foxes and the Hendra virus.