Second case of Hendra virus in NSW near Macksville

NSW Department of Primary Industries are controlling a second outbreak of Hendra virus in NSW, which has killed one horse on a property near Macksville on the Mid North Coast.

"The property has been placed in quarantine and the dead horse has been buried," NSW Chief Veterinary Officer Ian Roth said.

"There are three other horses on the quarantined property which are currently showing no signs of illness."

NSW Health Director of Health Protection Dr Jeremy McAnulty said that six people who have had close contact with the infected horse will be closely monitored for any symptoms of the infection.

"Public health Unit staff have interviewed these people to assess their level of exposure," he said.

Mr Roth said the Macksville area property was the second in NSW affected by Hendra virus after a Wollongbar property was quarantined following the death of one horse last Thursday.

"In NSW we now have single horse deaths to Hendra virus on two properties – one near Wollongbar and one near Macksville – involving four companion horses and 15 people who have been in contact with the affected horses," he said.

"The single surviving companion horse on the Wollongbar property remains in good health and initial tests for Hendra have returned negative, which is a good sign," he said.

Mr Roth said a veterinarian took samples from the horse near Macksville after it had died last Sunday.

"Samples from the dead horse were sent to DPI's Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute for laboratory analysis and results confirmed the Hendra virus.

"Horse movements on and off the property are being checked by veterinary staff."

He said there were no current horse-movement or people-movement links to the Wollongbar property or the recent Hendra outbreaks in Queensland.

"The horse had been in a paddock containing a fig tree, so it is likely that flying foxes were the source of infection," he said.

"Hendra virus can spread from flying foxes to horses and, rarely, from horses to people.

Mr Roth said Hendra virus can cause a range of clinical signs in horses.

"Hendra should be considered in horses where there is acute onset of fever and rapid progression to death associated with either respiratory or nervous signs.

"If you suspect your horse has Hendra virus keep away from the horse and call your private veterinarian immediately.

"The vet will notify the local Livestock Health and Pest Authority or an inspector with DPI if they consider the case highly suspect for Hendra.

"If they are unavailable, and the illness is progressing rapidly, call the Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline on 1800 675 888."

NSW Health Director of Health Protection Dr Jeremy McAnulty said "All of the human infections that have occurred in the past have been linked to high level exposures to infected horses.

"There has been no evidence of human-to-human or flying fox-to-human spread of Hendra virus."

"Horses may shed Hendra virus before they show any signs of illness so it is always important to use good hygiene practices when around horses," Dr McAnulty said.

NSW Health advises people to always take the following steps to reduce the risk of becoming infected with Hendra virus:

- Cover any cuts or abrasions on exposed skin before handling horses and wash your hands well with soap and water, especially after handling your horse's mouth or nose (eg fitting or removing a bridle) and before eating, smoking or touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Don't kiss horses on the muzzle (especially not if the horse is sick).
- Use personal protective equipment to protect yourself from the body fluids of horses.

NSW Health Hendra virus Factsheet can be on the NSW Health website:
http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/factsheets/infectious/hendra.html

NSW DPI advises horse owners to take precautions in areas with flying foxes - to reduce the risk of their horses becoming infected:

- Place feed and water containers under cover.
- Do not place feed and water under trees, especially trees with fruit.
- Do not use feed that could attract flying foxes, such as apples, carrots, or molasses.
- If possible, remove horses from paddocks where flowering trees have temporarily attracted flying foxes.
- If removing horses is not possible, take horses out during times of peak flying fox activity, usually at dusk and during the night.

More information on Hendra virus is available on website www.agriculture.nsw.gov.au/info/hendra

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