

Unvaccinated horse dies from Hendra virus as Queensland records first case in three years

ABC NEWS
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A horse in south-east Queensland has died after contracting Hendra virus. (ABC Rural: Melanie Groves)

A horse in south-east Queensland has died after contracting Hendra virus, in what authorities say is the state's first case of the disease since 2022.

Biosecurity Queensland said an unvaccinated horse tested positive for the infection on Friday, July 4 and its "condition rapidly deteriorated".

The last time Hendra virus was detected in the state was in Mackay in 2022.

Prior to that, no cases had been recorded since 2017.



A horse is treated during a previous outbreak of Hendra virus. (ABC News)

Hendra virus can infect horses and humans and is potentially deadly to both.

It can be transmitted from flying fox to horse, from horse to horse, from horse to dog and from horse to human.

Horses are believed to contract the virus by coming into contact with material contaminated by infected flying fox body fluids and excretions.

It can then spread from horse to horse through direct contact with infectious body fluids and indirect contact via contaminated equipment.



Horse owners are encouraged to vaccinate their animals against the virus. (AAP: Dan Peled)

Vaccinations encouraged

Chief Veterinary Officer Dr Fiona Thompson said officers were working closely with the horse's owner to manage the risk of the virus spreading.

"Tracing and exposure assessments have been undertaken on other horses and animals on the property," Dr Thompson said.

"We are also working with Queensland Health in relation to humans who may have had contact with the infected horse so their experts can manage the health of people involved."

Horse owners are encouraged to vaccinate their animals against the disease to protect them.

There is no vaccine for humans against Hendra virus and although instances of it spreading to people are rare, it can happen.

Queensland Chief Health Officer Dr Heidi Carroll said Queensland Health staff had contacted all known people who had been exposed to the infectious horse.

"We know from past cases of Hendra virus infection in horses that most people exposed remain well and don't contract the infection," Dr Carroll said.

"People who are assessed as having a high level of exposure to the infected horse will undergo prioritised testing for the virus."

Equine Veterinarians Australia (EVA) and the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) on Sunday echoed calls for horse owners to vaccinate their animals against the disease.

AVA president Dr Gemma Chuck said the consequences of the rare virus could be "devastating".

"Veterinarians and horse owners must continue to work together to promote vaccination and biosecurity practices that help protect both animal and human health," Dr Chuck said.



People are encouraged to wash their hands with soap and water regularly after touching horses. (Unsplash: rawpixel)

Anyone who interacts with horses has been encouraged to exercise the following good hygiene practices:

- Washing hands with soap and water regularly after touching horses, particularly before eating, smoking or touching your eyes, nose or mouth;
- Covering wounds with a waterproof dressing;
- Wearing personal protective equipment if it is likely you will come into contact with body fluids from any horse; and,
- Washing unprotected skin with soap and water if it comes into contact with a horse's body fluids or manure.

Virus discovered in Brisbane in '90s

Hendra virus was first discovered in 1994 when it swept through racing stables in the Brisbane suburb of Hendra, killing a trainer and 13 horses.

Since then, there have been 66 known outbreaks across Australia, killing four people and 90 horses.

The most recent of those human deaths occurred in 2009.

In horses, the virus can manifest itself in a variety of symptoms including fever, heart rate and restlessness.

Queensland Health said people infected by the virus had become unwell with an influenza-like illness as well as encephalitis (inflammation of the brain).

The latter can lead to symptoms like headaches, fever and drowsiness.

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<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-07-06/hendra-virus-horse-death-southeast-queensland/105500086>