

# Media Release

Thursday 14 October 2021 | Media contact: Sophie Patrick 0402 928 452

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## NEW HENDRA VIRUS GENOTYPE DISCOVERED

Agriculture Victoria is reminding horse owners to take steps to protect their horses from Hendra virus following the discovery of a previously unidentified virus genotype.

Victoria's Chief Veterinary Officer, Dr Graeme Cooke said the further genotype was last week detected in a horse near Newcastle, New South Wales – the most southern detection of Hendra virus in a horse to date.

This follows on from a detection earlier this year, in an historic sample from a Queensland horse. The virus was also detected in 11 historical flying fox (fruit bat) archived samples.

“The flying fox is the natural host for Hendra virus but not known to transmit Hendra virus to humans.”

“Seven of the 11 detections in bats are attributed to Victorian samples from grey-headed flying foxes collected for other testing, going back to 2013.”

“Hendra virus remains a potentially fatal zoonotic threat and as our knowledge increases the assessment of risk may change. The risk in Victoria, though, is unchanged.”

The recently identified genotype displays similar characteristics to the already known Hendra virus and researchers at Australia's national science agency CSIRO said they expect the Hendra vaccine for horses should also be effective against the new virus type.

“This discovery serves as a timely reminder for horse owners to be vigilant about biosecurity on their properties. People can be infected with Hendra virus through contact with infected horses and vaccination is an effective way to prevent infection in horses”.

“Horse owners should always adopt caution when a horse is unwell and report any signs of illness early. Avoid contact with a sick horse that is showing clinical signs when Hendra virus is a possible diagnosis. Strict infection control measures should be implemented under veterinary supervision.”

Horse owners can take steps to protect their animals from Hendra virus including:

- moving feed and water away from trees where bats may roost
- discussing Hendra vaccination options with their vet
- early isolation of a sick horse while waiting veterinary attention
- good hygiene and cleaning practices
- isolating new horses to their property, especially if they have travelled or co-mingled at events with horses from areas where Hendra cases have been previously detected (NSW or QLD).

Horse owners and veterinarians are reminded to remain vigilant for diseases such as Hendra virus and should report any unusual illness to the Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline on 1800 675 888.

Flying foxes are protected species that are critical to our environment because they pollinate native trees and spread seeds. Biosecurity measures will help to minimise the risk of Hendra virus transmission, while protecting these important species and their role in maintaining a healthy environment.

For more information about Hendra visit [agriculture.vic.gov.au/biosecurity/animal-disease/horse-disease/Hendra-virus](https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/biosecurity/animal-disease/horse-disease/Hendra-virus)