

JEV – Fact Sheet

HRA is continuing to work directly with Government agencies and working groups in coordinating an equine industry response to the recent outbreaks of Japanese Encephalitis. The Commonwealth government is currently working with the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicine Authority (APVMA) to obtain an emergency use permit for an inactivated JE vaccine for use in animals as part of the disease response.

HRA needs to establish what our industry's requirements would be in the event that a vaccine rollout is made available from the Government. In order to do this your input is required in the submission form below. Your responses will assist HRA to coordinate an informed rollout of vaccine in the harness racing industry.

What is Japanese Encephalitis?

Japanese encephalitis is a viral zoonotic disease that is spread by infected mosquitoes to people, horses, pigs, birds and other animals. People and horses are considered 'dead end' hosts - once infected, they do not play a role in transmitting the virus.

Waterbirds are the main natural reservoirs of JE virus. Transmission is maintained in mosquito - water bird, or mosquito – waterbird - pig cycles.

Where is it?

Outbreaks of Japanese encephalitis virus (JE) have been reported in 61 piggeries in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. This is the first time that JE has been detected in southern Australia.

What are the signs/symptoms of JEV?

Horses In horses, many cases are subclinical, meaning they are infected but show no signs of disease. Most clinical disease is mild, however more severe encephalitis can occur which may be fatal. Signs of disease include;

- fever
- jaundice
- lethargy
- loss of appetite
- neurological signs including incoordination, difficulty swallowing, impaired vision, neck rigidity. Occasionally, in the most severe cases, hyperexcitable behaviour occurs, coupled with blindness, profuse sweating, teeth-grinding, and spasmodic muscle twitching. Collapse and death are common one to two days later.

Humans Most Japanese encephalitis virus infections in people are asymptomatic, however, those with severe infection may experience;

- fever
- headache
- vomiting
- neck stiffness
- coma
- and more rarely, permanent neurological complications or death.

Encephalitis is the most serious clinical consequence of infection and three people have died in Australia as a result of this current outbreak.

What can I do to protect my horse and myself?

Preventative measures such as rugging and hooding horses with a lightweight summer rug and fly mask can help protect against mosquito bites. Stabling horses between dusk and dawn may also be beneficial and if the horse allows, apply a safe insect repellent. People should also try to prevent mosquito bites by using a mosquito repellent containing picaridin, DEET or oil of lemon eucalyptus on all exposed skin and reapply every few hours; wear long, light coloured and loose-fitting clothes; and covered footwear.

Vaccine

JE vaccines have been routinely used in Asia to vaccinate thousands of horses for over 30 years. JE virus is established in Japan, Hong Kong, Macau, Malaysia and Singapore and vaccination has been extremely effective in reducing the incidence of clinical disease in these countries. Apart from an occasional brief local reaction at the site of injection, no side effects have been reported.

There is no JE vaccination currently approved for use in the general horse population in Australia however the Commonwealth government is working closely with the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicine Authority (APVMA) to obtain an emergency use permit for an inactivated JE vaccine for use, if required, as part of the disease response.

It is currently uncertain if there will be a fee from the Commonwealth Government to provide these vaccines or how many will be available, the form below will assist HRA in coordinating its requirements.