

Information for Riders and Trainers: the AERA Biosecurity Document, and the Importance of Completing Horse Health Declarations

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Biosecurity means using a comprehensive approach to managing infectious diseases to reduce the risk of disease transmission. This summary of the AERA Biosecurity Statement identifies the essential considerations for riders and trainers. Biosecurity includes hygiene practices, measures to prevent infectious diseases entering an endurance ride venue and surrounding roads and tracks and to manage infectious diseases should they enter a ride venue. The full AERA Biosecurity Statement will be available following the March 2016 AERA meeting

It is important to understand that the Biosecurity Statement applies to management of infectious disease risk in general, which could include strangles, diarrhoea and respiratory illness. Information specifically relating to Hendra virus risk and its potential to cause illness in humans is included.

While this document is not specifically related to Hendra virus and associated outbreaks, it is important to note that the ***vaccination of horses against the Hendra virus is recognised as the single most effective means of controlling the spread of this virus.*** Hendra disease in horses has a low incidence but can be spread to humans. As at March 2016, Hendra infection of horses has been restricted to coastal Queensland and a coastal area of NSW from Kempsey to the Queensland border, but because of the flight patterns of the bat species which carry the virus, government authorities are hesitant to define what are normally known as endemic areas. For the purpose of the document the areas where Hendra has occurred are known as Hendra Risk Zones. In NSW the local government areas in which Hendra cases have been identified are: Ballina Shire Council, Byron Shire Council, Kempsey Shire Council, Lismore City Council, Nambucca Shire Council, and Tweed Shire Council. Hendra Risk Zones also include adjoining local government areas: Bellingen Shire, Clarence Valley, Coffs Harbour, Macquarie Hastings Shire, Kyogle Council, and Richmond Valley. Infectious diseases in horses are associated with body temperature increases. Monitoring and recording of body temperature is an essential part of managing the risk of infectious disease and are a central part of the AERA Biosecurity Statement. Temperature records and a declaration by the rider or trainer responsible for a horse that the horse is healthy form a 'Horse Health Declaration'. A Horse Health Declaration must be provided for every horse taken to an endurance event venue. This includes companion horses.

There are two types of Horse Health Declaration (HHD), the difference being the length of time for which temperatures must be recorded:

- Horses which have not been in a Hendra Risk Zone: temperature logs for 3 days before arrival at the ride venue is required
- Horses vaccinated against Hendra: temperature logs for 3 days before arrival at the ride venue is required
- Horses not vaccinated against Hendra going to a ride in a Hendra Risk Zone: temperature logs for 10 days before arrival at the ride venue is required
- Horses not vaccinated against Hendra and from a Hendra Risk Zone going to ride in an area which is not a Hendra Risk Zone: temperature logs for 10 days before arrival at the ride venue is required
- At the Tom Quilty (National Championships) and FEI rides horses travel from a broad geographic area and decisions about the duration of the temperature log will be made by the Ride Organising Committee and the Head Veterinarian.

As stated at the start of this document there are equine diseases other than Hendra that can debilitate a horse and possibly put other horses at rides at risk. With Strangles horses show temperature rise early in their illness, as can horses infected with Herpes virus which causes severe respiratory disease and sometimes neurological symptoms. It is essential for all riders and trainers to ensure that they take the temperature of their horses in the days before an endurance ride, and that temperatures are accurately recorded. If your horse has a temperature over 38.5 C and/or shows other signs of being unwell, do not take it to a ride without obtaining clearance via an examination by a veterinarian. If you take an unwell horse to a ride, other horses catch it's illness and/or the ride is subsequently shut down as a result, you are going to be extremely unpopular and potentially financially responsible!!

Other recommendations in the Biosecurity Statement that apply to riders and trainers are:

- Minimise direct nose to nose contact between horses that are not regularly in contact with each other
- Everyone handling horses should wash or sanitise their hands between contact with different horses, especially other people's horses
- Horse floats and trucks should be cleaned and disinfected before departing to the event
- Competitors are responsible for cleaning up manure from yards and placing it in designated areas
- Competitors are required to advise the event organisers immediately if a horse is unwell, to stop all non-essential contact with the unwell horse and not allow other people to have close contact with the horse.

It is correct that horses likely have nose to nose contact in communal water troughs during the ride, because water is obviously an essential component of horse welfare. The risk of infectious disease transmission will be reduced at that time because every horse will have had a veterinary examination, including wellness check.

Veterinarians and Hendra Risk Zones

Veterinarians are essential to endurance to monitor the well-being of horses and provide treatment when needed. In that role vets are the arbiters of equine welfare from within the sport. There is some unease amongst vets required to monitor and treat unvaccinated horses in and coming from Hendra Risk Zones. At this time Hendra has not occurred at an endurance ride but if it did occur vets, and in particular, treatment vets will be at risk. In addition state government Work Health and Safety legislation is putting additional demands on vets regarding procedures if a Hendra case occurs.

We are in danger of losing some vets from the sport. Clearly, vaccination of endurance horses which come from Hendra Risk Zones and or attend endurance events in Hendra Risk Zones is the best way to address this situation.