

Queensland Horse Council Inc.

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Qld Horse Council Inc.

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Hendra Vaccine Development

Hendra Virus has spread from infected horses to people with tragic results, and four people have died. The Hendra virus has a mortality rate of 57% in humans and 75% in horses, however a policy of compulsory euthanasia of recovered horses under the AUSTVETPLAN brings the equine toll to 100%.

As well as the loss of human life, the cost to the horse industry has been enormous. Added to that is the great cost to Government, with each outbreak requiring a comprehensive response to ensure the health and safety of the general horse population and the people involved.

The virus is endemic to Australia and outbreaks will continue, and the evidence of the current Hendra incidents is that these will probably occur with increased frequency in the future. It is also likely that Hendra virus will occur in other areas of Australia besides Queensland and northern NSW.

In the early stages of infection in horses, the disease can present in a broad variety of ways, some as common as depression, lameness or colic, and in these early stages horses can be shedding the virus with no clinical signs at all.

The possibility of preventing HeV infection in horses by effective immunisation, and therefore stopping the disease before there is a transfer to a vet, horse owner/carer, will be a far better option than trying to treat human infection from horse-to-human transmission.

The Qld Horse Council has vigorously pursued the development of a Hendra Vaccine for horses. The trials on horses for the development of vaccine have been very successful, with it now ready to move through the process towards production of a commercial vaccine.

This process should be accelerated as much as possible as long as the aims and requirements of a successful vaccine are not compromised. These are safety, efficiency, level of immunity and duration of immunity (preferably 12mths). If there is a way to use data already compiled, rather than having to duplicate the process, and that satisfies the above requirements, then we urge the appropriate authorities to expedite the process.