

ABLV – veterinarian communiqué

21 May 2013

First known equine case

Biosecurity Queensland has quarantined a property in the Southern Downs area after a horse tested positive to Australian bat lyssavirus (ABLV) on Friday 17 May 2013.

This is the first known case of ABLV in a horse.

Clinical presentation

On 6 May 2013 a yearling horse was noticed as being off-color with subtle dullness and ataxia. A private veterinarian assessed the horse through multiple visits. The horse's condition deteriorated over the next few days and was showing ataxia, head pressing, dysphagia and hypermetria with a temperature of 39°C.

On 10 May 2013, the horse was in sternal recumbency and had difficulty standing. It was drinking but not eating and had a heart rate of 60 beats / minute. The veterinarian collected samples for Hendra virus testing which returned negative PCR results on blood and nasal, oral and rectal swabs.

On the 11 May 2013 the horse was having seizures and was euthanased by the veterinarian who also undertook a necropsy where spinal cord, brain, cerebrospinal fluid and blood were collected.

Histopathology showed severe subacute diffuse non-purulent encephalitis and myelitis. As this presentation can be seen with ABLV infection, Biosecurity Queensland pathologists ran tests for ABLV. ABLV PCR and Fluorescent Antibody Technique (FAT) results were positive.

Prior to these events a paddock mate to the infected horse displayed similar clinical signs. Onset of signs in this yearling horse began on 2 May 2013 and deteriorated to the point that it was euthanased on 6 May 2013 after becoming recumbent and having seizures.

Work up on this horse included laboratory testing for Hendra virus, tetanus and flavivirus. Flavivirus infection was considered a differential diagnosis as a local surge of mosquitoes had been noted in the previous three to four weeks.

Hendra virus and flavivirus test results for this horse were negative. Further testing is being undertaken on remaining samples from this horse to determine it's ABLV status.

Case Management

This case highlights the benefit of systematically working through a diagnostic investigation in neurological horses. The private veterinarian and the Biosecurity Queensland laboratory staff involved are to be commended in their thorough and systematic approach to the case.

This finding identifies the need to review the diagnostic approach to neurological horses.

Chief Veterinary Officers met today to discuss the incident and inform disease management and future testing protocols.

Infection control

It should be assumed that any Australian bat could potentially carry ABLV. Animal owners should be advised to take all reasonable steps to keep their animals away from bats.

It is also important to ensure sound hygiene and biosecurity measures are routinely adopted for all contact with horses including their saliva, blood and other body fluids and associated equipment.

Only people who have been vaccinated against rabies should handle bats and preferably those that have been trained in, or have experience with handling bats.

Any person who has been scratched or bitten by a bat should wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water for at least five minutes. If available, apply an antiseptic such as iodine or alcohol after washing and seek medical advice.

If bat saliva comes into contact with the eyes, nose or mouth, flush the area thoroughly with water and seek medical advice.

Further information

[Guidelines for veterinarians handling potential Australian bat lyssavirus infection in animals](#) are available for veterinarians on the Biosecurity Queensland website at: www.biosecurity.qld.gov.au

The guidelines will assist veterinarians in the safe management of incidents involving contact between domestic animals and bats that have potential for these animals to acquire ABLV.

These guidelines are currently under review to include information from the recent equine incident.

ABLV is a notifiable disease. If you suspect that an animal may be infected with ABLV you must report it to Biosecurity Queensland by calling:

- 13 25 23 (business hours) or
- Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline on 1800 675 888 (24-hour hotline)

For more information about ABLV, visit Biosecurity Queensland's website www.biosecurity.qld.gov.au

For information about human health concerns regarding ABLV, contact Queensland Health on:

- 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84)

For information about managing ABLV risks at workplaces, contact Workplace Health and Safety Queensland on:

- 1300 369 915 or
- visit www.worksafe.qld.gov.au

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