



The Hon Barry O'Farrell MP

Premier of NSW

Minister for Western Sydney

MEDIA RELEASE

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PREMIERS COMMIT \$6 MILLION TO CROSS BORDER HENDRA RESEARCH

NSW Premier Barry O'Farrell and Queensland Premier Anna Bligh today announced an additional \$6 million funding to boost vital research into the Hendra virus.

The NSW and Queensland Governments will each contribute \$3 million, after a meeting of internationally-renowned Hendra scientists and key members of the cross-border Hendra Taskforce in Brisbane today. The meeting follows a new twist in the current outbreak with the detection of Hendra in a dog in Queensland.

The Taskforce has identified three main research questions for further investigation:

- Why does the virus spill-over from flying foxes?
- How are horses and other animals exposed to Hendra Virus?
- Why is there such a spike in cases this year?

Mr O'Farrell said the additional funding would ensure Hendra virus researchers can continue their work to better understand the virus and respond to the current outbreak.

"This funding will investigate the reasons behind the recent spike in infection in both States and further precautionary measures to reduce transmission and infection in the future," Mr O'Farrell said.

"The research will identify key steps that can be taken to avoid more cases of the Hendra virus and ultimately minimise the risk of human infection."

Ms Bligh said experts from Queensland and NSW will closely coordinate their research and future strategies to combat Hendra.

"The increase in Hendra incidents this year and yesterday's announcement of a positive case in a dog in Queensland has raised new questions and challenges for our scientists," Ms Bligh said.

"This additional investment will ramp up vital research to help us better understand and respond to the Hendra virus," she said.

NSW Minister for Primary Industries Katrina Hodgkinson said specialist scientists from the NSW Government's Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute (EMAI) will form part of the team of disease experts.

“This year an increase in the number of confirmed cases of Hendra virus infection has been recorded and analysis of local flying fox populations shows a rise in the number of flying foxes carrying the virus.

“Greater understanding is needed around bat ecology, the triggers for bats to excrete more Hendra virus at certain times and whether this behaviour is specific to particular conditions or locations,” Ms Hodgkinson said.

The new research will include:

- Improving understanding even further on how the disease behaves in flying fox colonies – through mapping age and immunity structures within colonies and monitoring the stress of a colony by testing steroid levels in urine
- How horses and flying foxes interact – through further monitoring of flying fox and other animal behaviour at night, with more infra-red cameras in more locations throughout Queensland and NSW
- How environmental factors, such as food availability, temperature and rainfall impact on the likelihood of the disease ‘spilling over’ from flying foxes to animals.

In time, this research could lead to the development of a model that may help predict the risk of Hendra virus occurring and further improve the advice given to veterinarians and horse owners to prevent infection of horses and humans.

Each state has already committed significant human and financial resources to the Hendra virus research program, the extra funds announced today are in addition to these existing programs and activities.

The NSW Department of Primary Industry’s routinely tests all companion animals that are assessed as having had or been likely to have had close contact with an infected horse. All dogs and cats tested in NSW for Hendra have been negative.

For more information about Hendra virus, call the Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline on 1800 675 888 or visit www.dpi.nsw.gov.au