

## Japanese encephalitis – information for horse owners

Japanese encephalitis (JE) is a disease that can infect pigs, waterbirds and horses. JE is exotic to Australia but has recently been detected in pigs in southeast Australia, including South Australia.

### About the virus

JEV is an arbovirus which means it is transmitted via bites from infected mosquitoes. La Niña weather conditions have made the weather wetter and warmer than normal, increasing mosquito activity.

### Mosquito bites spread the virus

Mosquitoes become infected with the virus after feeding off an infected animal. Once infected, mosquitoes can spread the virus over long distances.

People can also become infected through mosquito bites. The virus does not spread from animals to animals, and it does not spread from animals to humans.

There is no evidence of human-to-human transmission of the virus.

### Symptoms to look for in horses

Many horses infected with the virus are asymptomatic. Most cases showing symptoms are mild, however severe encephalitis can cause death.

Common symptoms in horses and donkeys include:

- elevated temperature
- lethargy
- decreased or no appetite
- jaundice
- neurological such as incoordination, wobbliness, hyperexcitability
- difficulty swallowing or impaired vision.

Most horses will recover within a week of having this disease.

Other arboviruses may also show the same clinical signs. These include West Nile virus – Kunjin strain (WNV-Kunjin), Murray Valley encephalitis virus (MVEV) and Ross River virus (RRV) which are endemic to Australia.

## How you can minimise the risk to your horses

### Minimise horse exposure to mosquitos

- use mosquito repellent or netting
- put a light summer or cotton rug on horses, a fly mask, and if the horse allows, apply a safe insect repellent. Do not spray repellent around or above their eyes
- rugging and hooding with lightweight permethrin fabric may help protect horses not stabled overnight
- eliminate mosquito breeding sites by limiting the amount of stagnant water around horses
- house horses during peak periods of mosquito activity (between dusk and dawn).

### Treating the virus

There is no effective treatment for JE in horses or other livestock.

### Reporting an animal suspected with the virus

Japanese encephalitis is an exotic a notifiable exotic disease in South Australia.

If you suspect JE (or other arboviruses) in your horses, especially if showing clinical signs, please call the **Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline on 1800 675 888**.

### Arboviral diseases in humans

Arboviral diseases may also affect humans, with RRV and Barmah Forest virus being the most common arbovirus diseases in SA. Most JE infections in people cause no symptoms. Some infected people experience an illness with fever and headache but severe illness may cause fever, convulsions disorientation and coma. If you experience symptoms, you should seek medical advice and contact SA Health.