

Poor pasture increases risk of Hendra virus infections

June 14 2012

Hungry horses could be more susceptible to contracting Hendra virus, according to the findings of a preliminary study into the effect of pasture availability on infection rates.

The results from the joint study, by The University of Queensland (UQ) and Bahrinna Thoroughbred Services, analysed local pasture growth and quality against the timing and location of Hendra [virus outbreaks](#) in NSW and south-east Queensland during 2011.

Professor of [animal science](#) at UQ's School of Agriculture and Food Sciences, Professor Wayne Bryden, presented the research at the Australasian Equine Science Symposium at the Gold Coast this week.

“[Hendra virus](#) infections in 2011 coincided with periods of poor pasture growth caused by extended periods of frost and rain and so [horses](#) were likely to have been hungry at the time of infection,” Professor Bryden said.

“A hungry horse is more likely to consume bat-related material found on pastures.

“And because a horse's nutrient intake is significantly reduced due to poor pasture quality and availability, its immune system is possibly also compromised, thereby setting the scene for an infection.”

Professor Bryden said further work was required to understand the risk

factors involved with Hendra [virus infections](#), but that changes to horse management, such as providing supplementary feeding during poor pasture growth periods may be one preventative strategy.

Leading equine experts from Australia and New Zealand are presenting findings from more than 40 research projects at the 4th Australasian Equine Science Symposium, which concludes on Friday (June 15, 2012).

Research outcomes being presented include innovative pain-relief therapies, obesity and insulin resistance, effective electrolyte and water replacement strategies for racehorses, music for reducing stress of stabled yearlings, biological control of intestinal nematodes and the role of caterpillars in causing abortion in horses.

More information: The full symposium program can be viewed online at www.australasianequinescience.com/

Provided by University of Queensland

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