



# VET NEWS

Veterinary Board of the Northern Territory  
Newsletter

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## PETS AND SEVERE ACUTE RESPIRATORY SYNDROME CORONAVIRUS-2 (COVID-19)

COVID-19 is a newly emerged disease of humans. A very small number of cases involving spill-over to animals, from people infected with COVID-19, have been reported. Information about the causal virus, severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS CoV-2), and its relationship to domestic animals is sparse.

The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) advises that currently there is no evidence to suggest that animals infected with SARS CoV-2 from humans play a role in the transmission of the virus. All current knowledge points to the transmission and spread of SARS CoV-2 being between infected people.

### Current knowledge of SARS CoV-2 infection in animals

There has been experimental evidence based on SARS CoV-1 that both cats and ferrets could be infected with the SARS CoV-2, that ferrets could become ill from that infection and both species could efficiently transmit virus to other cats and ferrets that were living with them<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Martina, B., Haagmans, B., Kuiken, T. *et al.* SARS virus infection of cats and ferrets. *Nature* **425**, 915 (2003).  
<https://doi.org/10.1038/425915a>



In the current human pandemic emergency situation, a small number of dogs, felids (domestic cats as well as tigers and lions in captivity) and minks have tested positive to SARS CoV-2 all following close contact with infected humans. A serosurvey of cats in Wuhan (all associated with human cases of COVID-19) revealed 15% to be seropositive to SARS CoV-2.

Studies are underway to better understand the susceptibility of different animal species to SARS CoV-2 and to assess infection dynamics in susceptible animal species.

Preliminary findings from laboratory studies suggest that, of the animal species investigated so far, cats are the most susceptible species for SARS CoV-2, and cats can suffer clinical disease. In the laboratory setting cats were able to transmit infection to other cats.

Ferrets also appear to be susceptible to infection but less so to clinical disease. In the laboratory setting ferrets were also able to transmit infection to other ferrets.

Dogs appear to be susceptible to infection but appear to be less affected than ferrets or cats. Egyptian fruit bats were also infected in the laboratory setting but did not show signs of disease or the ability to transmit infection efficiently to other bats. Poultry and pigs do not appear to be susceptible to SARS CoV-2 infection.

### **Testing animals for SARS CoV-2 infection**

Current diagnostic testing and surveillance in Australian animals for SARS CoV-2 virus is not recommended. Animals presenting with illness should receive veterinary care. Where appropriate, testing for infectious diseases that commonly cause animal illness should be conducted. If veterinarians observe a new, concerning illness that cannot be otherwise explained, and the animal has had close contact with a person with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 infection, the supervising veterinarian should contact the Chief Veterinary Officer who will determine together with the Department of Health whether or not there is a need to test that animal for SARS CoV-2. If testing is required, it will be undertaken at the CSIRO Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness (the former Australian Animal Health Laboratory).

The Australian Veterinary Association provides advice for pet owners who may become infected with COVID-19 to take precautionary steps to limit close contact with their pets and to practice appropriate hand hygiene before and after handling them. At no stage should pet owners take measures that may compromise the welfare of their pets. Further information is available at <https://www.ava.com.au/coronavirus/>

## **AFRICAN SWINE FEVER PREPAREDNESS UPDATE**

African swine fever (ASF), the contagious viral disease of domestic and wild pigs spreading across the globe established itself in Africa and parts of Europe before moving into Asia. It was most recently reported in China, Mongolia, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, North Korea, South Korea, the Philippines, Timor Leste in September 2019, Indonesia in December 2019 and Papua New Guinea in March 2020– far too close to Australia for comfort!

In 2019, an alarming quantity of pork products were intercepted from air passengers and at mail centres entering Australia. During a twelve-month period from November 2018 to November 2019, 34 tonnes of pork products were surrendered or seized from air passengers entering Australia alone.

The CSIRO Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness tested samples of pork products taken from airline passengers and from mail centres for ASF virus in late 2018, early 2019 and again in September 2019. In the first 2 periods, the samples were collected in Melbourne and Sydney and in the latter period from Melbourne, Sydney, Perth and Brisbane.



In late 2018, 6 out of 152 samples contained ASF virus fragments. For the second period, in early February 2019, 40 out of 283 samples contained ASF virus fragments and two products tested positive for FMD virus fragments. In September 2019, 202 out of 418 samples tested positive for ASF virus fragments and three products tested positive for FMD virus fragments.

While ASF has never been reported in Australia, the changing distribution means it is a significant biosecurity threat. In December 2019, the Australian Government announced an ASF response package to address the immediate threat with:

- more biosecurity officers and six new detector dogs at International airports
- two new 3D x-ray machines that will be installed in the Sydney and Melbourne mail centres
- a new squad of post-border biosecurity officers to help identify and target incorrectly declared products brought into Australia for sale
- market access negotiations to facilitate continued trade if we did have an ASF outbreak

The Darwin International Airport also gratefully received a biosecurity detector dog which started work immediately assisting in the seizure of high risk port products from international passengers.

Vets who treat pigs (including peri-urban vets) should familiarise themselves with the clinical signs of ASF. Early detection and laboratory confirmation is critical for a rapid effective response. A national guide has been produced for veterinarians investigating suspect cases of ASF. The guide is available at <https://dpiir.nt.gov.au/boards-and-committees/veterinary-board-of-the-NT/information-for-veterinarians>

Please report any unusual cases of disease to NT Government veterinarians directly or through the Emergency Animal Disease Hotline on 1800 675 888.

## EMERGENCY ANIMAL DISEASE HOTLINE

Report suspect exotic, notifiable or emergency animal diseases and pests or biosecurity events to your NT Government Veterinary Officer on 8999 2035 in Darwin, 8973 9716 in Katherine or 8951 8181 in Alice Springs or the 24 hour Emergency Animal Disease Hotline

**1800 675 888**

## EMERGENCY ANIMAL DISEASES – A FIELD GUIDE FOR AUSTRALIAN VETERINARIANS

Another new resource for veterinarians is available on the Department of Agriculture, Water Resources and Environment's [Outbreak](#) website. The guide helps vets to identify important emergency animal diseases when confronted with disease situations in the field. It includes appropriate differential diagnoses; and necessary actions to take if presented with signs of an unusual disease.

Vets are on the front line for exotic animal diseases and this resource strengthens their toolkit for early identification and reporting – critical to minimise the harm these diseases can pose.



## HENDRA VIRUS

Local Land Services Hunter Region noted confirmation of Hendra virus infection by the State Veterinary Laboratory at Menangle 12 June 2019 in an unvaccinated mare on a property near Scone. In NSW to date there have been 22 horse deaths as a result of Hendra virus and whilst there have been no human fatalities from Hendra virus in NSW the disease presents significant work health and safety, public health and biosecurity risks.

Hendra virus infection is a notifiable disease in the Northern Territory.

NT Veterinarians are strongly advised to regularly review their Hendra virus work health and safety responsibilities.

## NATIONAL SIGNIFICANT DISEASE INVESTIGATION PROGRAM (NSDIP) – WILDLIFE REMINDER

Have you seen an unusual wildlife case that you'd like to investigate further? The National Significant Disease Investigation Program provides funds for veterinary investigation (usually around \$200 - \$350 but can be more for a large event) as well as to cover the cost of laboratory testing. Cases which have been eligible for funding include:

- Neurological signs in a variety species: black flying-fox, carpet python, tawny frogmouths, rainbow lorikeet, ravens, crested pigeon
- Diarrhoea and sudden death of ringtail possums in care
- Brushtail possums with renal changes and dermatitis
- Mortality and ocular lesions in pademelons
- Ill-thrift in koalas
- Epistaxis in western grey kangaroos
- Ear lesions in swamp wallabies
- Bar-shouldered doves with feather changes and diarrhea

It's easy to apply, you just need to email [cathy.shilton@nt.gov.au](mailto:cathy.shilton@nt.gov.au) with sufficient information for whether the case meets the criteria for NSDIP funding. This should include a brief history, why the event is unusual/significant, what has been done so far, and what further investigation is planned. Please feel free to get in touch if you'd like to talk through some cases and what might qualify.

## INFORMATION FOR VETERINARIANS – ANIMAL WELFARE

### Cruelty cases

Veterinarians from time to time may be faced with cases where an animal has suffered harm. Cases can range from overt cruelty, e.g. where an animal has been deliberately or maliciously injured, to cases where an animal may be suffering through lack of or inadequate treatment provided by the animal's owner, e.g. where an owner has failed to treat or euthanise an animal with a serious injury, such as a broken leg, or chooses for some reason not to proceed with treatment.

As a veterinarian, you are responsible for giving the owner information about the animal welfare consequences of such decisions. If an animal suffers because of a decision (or lack of



decision) by an owner who has been informed of the possible consequences, the owner is responsible.

In any such case where a veterinarian is concerned for an animal's welfare the veterinarian is encouraged to report the matter to the Animal Welfare Branch on 1300 720 386. All calls received are confidential.

When examining, providing treatment and providing advice in relation to animals in these situations, it is important for the veterinarian to keep accurate and detailed contemporaneous clinical records and to provide clear and detailed written instructions. This will assist further enforcement actions if required in the event that a treatment plan or instructions are not followed.

### Expert evidence

Veterinarians are sometimes asked to provide expert opinion to an inspector investigating a complaint under the NT *Animal Welfare Act* and may be required to provide expert evidence in court in the event of a prosecution.

It is important to appreciate and acknowledge that an expert's opinion must be independent and the duty of an expert is to assist a Court impartially on matters relevant to the expert's area of expertise.

## RELEASE OF THE NEW ANTIMICROBIAL RESISTANCE STRATEGY 2020 AND BEYOND

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is an important issue due to its adverse impacts on public health, animal health, animal welfare and production, and the economy. Since 2001 there have been national and international efforts towards a 'One Health' approach to the management of AMR.

In 2015 the Australian Government released its first National Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) Strategy 2015-2019 which included a number of priorities for action relating to antibiotic use in animals, as well as issues relating to veterinary practice such as infection prevention and control. In 2018, an animal sector National AMR Implementation Plan was developed <https://www.ava.com.au/siteassets/resources/fighting-antimicrobial-resistance/animal-sector-national-amr-plan-2018.pdf> focusing on a collaborative effort to increase awareness and understanding of AMR, change prescribing, dispensing and administering practices that have contributed to the development of AMR, co-ordinate a "One Health" approach to surveillance of AMR and antimicrobial usage (AMU), improve infection prevention and control and biosecurity, co-ordinate national research priorities for new products and new initiatives to reduce AMR, strengthen international collaboration and provide clear governance. Nationally, we have seen;

- Creation of a One Health antimicrobial resistance online hub
- Establishment of an Antimicrobial Use and Resistance in Australia (AURA) Surveillance System
- Completion of specific proof-of-concept antimicrobial resistance surveillance projects in the animal sector and,
- Significant investment in research and development through National Health and Medical Research Council grants, the Medical Research Future Fund and the Cooperative Research Centres Program.



In the Territory, the Berrimah Veterinary Laboratories have been actively involved in international and local projects to improve biosecurity and develop alternative strategies to manage disease in livestock and aquatic species.

The second National AMR Strategy 2020 and beyond <https://www.amr.gov.au/resources/australias-national-antimicrobial-resistance-strategy-2020-and-beyond> was recently released which builds on the achievements from 2015-2019 and broadens the scope from antimicrobials in the human and animal sector to encompass the plant and environmental sectors and other classes of antimicrobials such as antifungals and antivirals, antiseptics, antimalarials and anthelmintics.

In comparison to other countries, Australia holds a reputation for low use of antimicrobial agents and low frequency of AMR, meaning our animal industries have a strong foundation from which to address AMR. We have strong legislation around antimicrobial registration and use with prescription by registered veterinarians only. Antimicrobials important for human health that are of significant concern overseas have either not been registered or banned for use in animals in Australia. Similarly, Australia has legislation banning the use of antimicrobials as growth promotants within our intensive livestock industries.

Australia has been proactive in the adoption of antimicrobial stewardship (AMS) principles, and continuation of this momentum through collaborative efforts will be vital to maintaining and improving our positive status for AMS.

The following report provides an overview of historical and current practices relevant to AMS in each of the contributing industries and is primarily intended for the stakeholders who are interested to know how the livestock industries operate in Australia. The report is available at <https://www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au/antimicrobial-stewardship-in-australian-livestock-industries/>

#### **What you can do to contribute to AMS ?**

1. Pause and consider the need for each antibiotic prescription
2. Talk to clients about ways to minimise the use of antibiotics
3. Apply best practice biosecurity and hygiene measures, including antibiotic stewardship plans
4. Use published therapeutic guidelines, where available

More information on what veterinarians can do to reduce antibiotic resistance, including a printable infographic for clients, can be found at <https://www.amr.gov.au/what-you-can-do/veterinary-practice>

## **INCREASING AWARENESS AMONGST VETERINARIANS OF THE ROLE OF THE APVMA**

The Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) is the Australian Government Statutory Authority responsible for the assessment, registration and regulation of agricultural and veterinary chemical products from importation to the point of sale.

Australian and New Zealand veterinary boards, associations and practitioners play a key role in helping the APVMA ensure the supply of safe and effective veterinary medicines. As everyday users of these products, vets are well placed to report any observed adverse effects or notify the APVMA about non-compliant or unregistered veterinary chemical products.



Practicing veterinarians are also key stakeholders who can benefit from being informed when a veterinary medicine is being recalled from the market.

### **Adverse Experience Reporting Program (AERP)**

The Adverse Experience Reporting Program (AERP) is a program of the APVMA that assesses reports of adverse experiences associated with the use of a registered veterinary medicine or agricultural chemical product. An adverse experience may involve:

- Risks to safety in animals
- Risks to safety in humans using or exposed to the product/s
- Lack of efficacy, when the correct label dose is used
- Other unintended or unexpected side effects.

The APVMA encourages veterinarians to report adverse experiences, including those where a product has been used off-label. Highlighting concerns with products of particular pharmacological significance, such as antimicrobials, is also strongly encouraged.

All adverse experiences reported to the APVMA are assessed to determine causality. Where it is observed that a product or active constituent has an incidence rate that would lead APVMA to question its safety or efficacy, or in other certain circumstances, the APVMA may pursue regulatory action such as batch testing, label variations or product recalls.

The AERP has an online reporting form and welcomes emails ( [AERP@apvma.gov.au](mailto:AERP@apvma.gov.au) ) or phone calls (1800 700 583) to discuss cases if there are concerns. The APVMA is also in the process of updating web content so any feedback on these webpages is welcomed.

### **Recall of veterinary products from the market**

The APVMA is responsible for the recall of veterinary medicines from the market. Participation in a recall, whether it's initiated by the manufacturer or the APVMA, is mandatory.

There are a number of reasons why a product (or a particular batch) may be recalled, those most relevant to practicing veterinarians include:

- risks to safety,
- a lack of efficacy,
- the product is unregistered,
- labelling or manufacturing errors

The majority of recalls are initiated and managed by the manufacturer. However, in certain situations the APVMA may compulsorily require the recall of a product. A recent example of this is the APVMA-initiated recall of unregistered veterinary chemical products bearing the HAMPL trademark.

The easiest way to be kept informed of recalls is to subscribe to the APVMA's listing of recalls notices. To be notified of recalls via email, your members are invited to complete a subscription form and select 'recall notices.' Any queries or comments regarding a particular recall or stop supply notice can be submitted directly to [recalls@apvma.gov.au](mailto:recalls@apvma.gov.au).



## AUSTRALIAN PESTICIDES AND VETERINARY MEDICINES AUTHORITY WEBPAGE FOR VETERINARIANS

A webpage specifically for veterinarians is available on the APVMA website  
<https://apvma.gov.au/node/6881>

In particular there are a number of useful fact sheets on the website for veterinarians to give to clients. For example, a fact sheet for clients wanting to purchase veterinary products online is available outlining the laws that govern the supply of these products.

Information about the current scheduling of veterinary medicines can be found at the APVMA [pubCRIS](#) database.

