

Check your understanding



1 How can you get Hendra virus?

Answer

HeV is a disease carried by bats, but the bats don't transmit the virus directly to humans as far as we know. Instead, horses become infected by sniffing or eating food contaminated by bats' body fluids (like urine), and infected horses can transmit the virus to people. Nevertheless, you should never touch a bat, even with gloves on. Only people who have had some training in safe handling and who have been vaccinated against Australian bat lyssavirus (ABLV), which is similar to the rabies virus, should handle bats. If you find a sick or injured bat, just put a cardboard box over it and call your local animal control office.

2 What is the primary cause of Hendra virus emergence and why?

Answer

Habitat loss. It drives bats closer to human-occupied areas, which makes it easier for the virus to get to people.

3 According to our study, are people in Australia inclined to accept ecological approaches to manage HeV emergence?

Answer

Even though our juries prioritized the existing measures – vaccination and safer practices among horse owners – they all agreed that ecological approaches should be implemented as well.

4 Would killing the bats be another solution? Why or why not?

Answer

First of all, bats are not pests. Flying foxes are important pollinators. Killing them would have more negative consequences. Some people do try to kill bats to keep them from infecting their horses with viruses. However, bats are relatively small, and it's not very efficient to try to kill them. What's more, trying to kill bats disrupts their place in the ecosystem, which along with stress could increase HeV spillover.