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**From:** [kate.purvis](mailto:kate.purvis)

**To:** [premier@ministerial.qld.gov.au](mailto:premier@ministerial.qld.gov.au) ; [deputypremier@ministerial.qld.gov.au](mailto:deputypremier@ministerial.qld.gov.au) ; [dghealth@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:dghealth@health.qld.gov.au) ; [surfers.paradise@parliament.qld.gov.au](mailto:surfers.paradise@parliament.qld.gov.au) ; [southern.downs@parliament.qld.gov.au](mailto:southern.downs@parliament.qld.gov.au) ; [cleveland@parliament.qld.gov.au](mailto:cleveland@parliament.qld.gov.au) ; [Cindy Medway](#)

**Sent:** Friday, August 21, 2009 12:06 AM

**Subject:** Qld Health response to Hendra Virus

My name is Kate Purvis. I was one of those affected by the Proserpine Hendra virus cases last year. I am disgusted and sickened to see that another Hendra case has placed more people in the same situation that I was in around this time last year.

### **Authorities need to start treating Hendra Virus with the seriousness that it deserves.**

The lack of awareness of horse owners regarding the potentially deadly Hendra Virus is a reflection of the lack of seriousness with which it is treated by authorities. Aside from the fact that if more awareness was encouraged by authorities, that people would not be getting exposed to Hendra virus like they are, Qld Health responses to Hendra Virus are nothing short of disgusting and utterly lacking in all aspects.

Any human Hendra virus testing must be authorised by Qld health and so without their authorisation there is no other avenue for people to receive testing, so basically you are at their mercy. I tried to arrange my own testing through my GP who, after making enquiries, was told that he was not allowed to do the testing and that I had no option but to go through Qld Health.

The person in charge of my case with Qld health did absolutely nothing to make me feel like I was being taken seriously at any time and for most of the time I was made to feel that I was nothing more than an annoyance to him. I was treated with disdain in most of my conversations and repeatedly told that my fears were unfounded as it was just so unlikely that I would become infected anyway.

When you are facing the fear of being infected with a rare & deadly virus that has no known treatment, cure or vaccine, the last thing you need is someone speaking to you as though you are totally over reacting just because you have asked to be tested.

I was asked if I was taking any medications, after telling this person that I was currently taking a common fertility drug prescribed by my GP, he commented that he was not allowed to prescribe that drug himself. This did nothing to make me feel that I was dealing with an experienced health professional if he was not even qualified enough to prescribe common prescription drugs. It certainly scared me that if I should be infected, that these were the people who would be treating me.

I had to plead my case to the point of feeling like I was begging to be tested even though I'd had direct contact with the body fluids of a dying horse - saliva from a dying horse came into contact with my mouth and it then tested positive to Hendra after autopsy. I was then told that I would only be tested the once which as I later found out would not have shown a positive result even if I had been infected as I was initially tested very early in the incubation period, I had to again beg for the second follow up tests and was told that he would have to get back to me after he had tried to get permission from his superiors for me but that he didn't like my chances because it was felt that I had not been exposed enough anyway, (until Ben Cuneen died and then all of a sudden Qld health seemed a little more concerned and arranged for the third round of tests)

We were told that arrangements would be made for us to go to the local hospital to get the testing done but when we arrived, none of the staff had any information about how the tests should be done, what tubes to use, etc.

One round of my blood test samples was "misplaced". Everyone else received their results on a Friday but I received a call to say that they had misplaced my samples and was told to have a nice weekend and that they would contact me again next week if they found them or else I would need to have another sample taken. Obviously they had no intention of looking for the missing samples over the weekend and had absolutely no regard for my mental worry at the time.

At no time was the testing process explained to me and only through finding out for myself from other members of the public who knew what had been done previously and by experiencing what testing was being done for the horses did I learn that follow up testing was required and at what intervals, etc.

When the final tests did come back negative (thankfully), I was told the result along with the comment “but we knew that would be the result anyway”. He may as well have said – see I told you so and all you have done is wasted my time. Oh and he also told me that if I felt that I was depressed, I should see someone about it.

Unlike DPI&F who at least accepted input from stakeholders, even though most was ignored or glossed over, Qld Health did not allow the people involved with the Hendra cases last year to provide any input into how they could improve their response procedures. Apparently they did do a review of their handling, however this seems to have been a review behind closed doors and probably involved a quick get together where they patted themselves on the back and told each other what a grand job they had done. Obviously nothing has changed from last year with the current happenings in the Cawarral case as reflected in media articles.

I applaud the people at the centre of the Cawarral case for their outspokenness regarding their treatment by Qld Health and now wish I had done the same as it seems that Qld Health will only respond to negative media reports rather than listening to people who are willing to provide constructive criticism even after they have been treated so badly.

As Hendra cases are increasing in number and regularity, as is predicted by the researchers of this virus, Qld Health need to conduct a proper review of their procedures and communication methods to fix this problem. From my experience, it appears that there are no standard procedures in place at all. I really cannot see how hard it could be to have a standard procedure that involved simple instructions such as:

1. Each person at risk of exposure requires a minimum of three separate tests. The first shall be taken immediately and used as a reference sample, the second two weeks later and the third at least three weeks after the last possible exposure. (Last death of a horse on the property)
2. Full and detailed instructions on which test tubes are to be used, the method of transport required and where samples are to be sent (this must be made readily available to all hospital staff throughout Queensland.)

Surely being that there are only a small number of these cases in a year, two or three people (allowing for annual leave, etc.) could be given the job of being in charge of these cases so that anyone exposed can expect to receive advice directly from a person familiar with this virus and the correct testing procedures. The persons selected for this role should be people who can at least show empathy with and consideration for the fears and concerns of those exposed and not treat them like they are a nuisance.

As far as procedures for treatment, etc I will leave that to the experts as I am only a layperson.

Here I go again, PLEASE WILL SOMEONE DO SOMETHING! I AM BEGGING FOR SOMEONE TO DO SOMETHING so that for the sake of anyone exposed to Hendra Virus in the future, they will not be subjected to similar treatment by Qld Health.

Hendra Virus is an unmanaged emerging disease and needs to be taken seriously PLEASE!!!