



Australian Government

Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment

Emergency animal disease alert for pig producers

Japanese Encephalitis Virus

Outbreaks of Japanese encephalitis virus have been reported in piggeries in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. This is the first time that the virus has been detected in southern Australia.

JE is spread by mosquitoes. Waterbirds act as natural reservoirs for the virus, and mosquitos can spread the virus to people, horses, pigs and other animals.

People and horses are considered 'dead end' hosts - once infected, they do not play a role in transmitting the virus. Pigs and some species of wild birds are amplifying hosts.



In animals, signs of disease are most common in pigs horses. Other animals can be infected but typically do not show signs of illness. These include cattle, sheep, goats, dogs, cats, bats, rodents, reptiles, amphibians, and birds.

Japanese encephalitis is not a food safety concern. Commercially produced pork meat or pork products are safe to consume.

Reporting requirements

Pig owners need to be alert to signs of disease. Japanese encephalitis is a nationally notifiable disease which means it **must be reported to a veterinarian or biosecurity authorities**. To report, call the national **Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline** on **1800 675 888**. This number will put you in contact with the biosecurity authority in your state or territory.

Pigs

In pigs, the most common clinical signs are mummified and stillborn or weak piglets, some with neurological signs.

Piglets infected after birth can develop encephalitis which presents as paddling or other neurological signs in the first six months of life. In other cases, wasting, depression or hindlimb paralysis may be seen in suckling piglets and weaners.

Adult sows do not typically show overt signs of disease. If boars are present on farm, they may experience infertility and oedematous, and congested testicles.

Preventative measures

People working or otherwise in contact with pigs, including those who may have a small herd or pet, should take steps to control mosquitoes, and continue to use effective biosecurity measures.

Pig producers should refer to the *National Pork Biosecurity Manual* which provides in-depth detail on biosecurity practices and management in piggeries:
farmbiosecurity.com.au/porkbiosecuritymanual.

Human health advice

Most Japanese encephalitis virus infections in people are asymptomatic, however, those with severe infection (which occurs in less than one per cent of cases) may experience neck stiffness, coma, and more rarely, permanent neurological complications or death. Encephalitis is the most serious clinical consequence of infection. Illness usually begins with symptoms such as sudden onset of fever, headache and vomiting. Anyone experiencing these symptoms, especially if they've visited regions in Eastern Australia or South Australia with areas of high mosquito activity, should seek urgent medical attention.

People should try to prevent mosquito bites by using a mosquito repellent containing picaridin, DEET or oil of lemon eucalyptus on all exposed skin and reapply every few hours; wear long, light coloured and loose-fitting clothes; and covered footwear.

Government response

The Australian, state and territory governments are working with the pig and horse industries through the Consultative Committee on Emergency Animal Diseases in response to this outbreak. We are also working closely with human health authorities.

The response strategy for this disease is outlined in the Japanese encephalitis AUSVETPLAN.

Further information is available at outbreak.gov.au including links to AUSVETPLAN, and your state or territory department of agriculture or primary industries.