

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**EMBARGO LIFTS 12.01AM AEDT, THURSDAY 01 NOVEMBER 2012**

## **Vaccine arrives to boost the fight against deadly Hendra virus**

*International collaborative partnership develops vaccine to combat one of  
Australia's most lethal viruses*

**Brisbane, Australia – 01 November 2012:** From today, Australian horse owners and the equine industry will receive an important boost in their fight against the deadly Hendra virus with the introduction of Equivac<sup>®</sup> HeV vaccine. Available under permit from accredited veterinarians, the vaccine will also assist in breaking the cycle of transmission that puts humans at risk of contracting this potentially lethal virus.

With a high mortality rate, this virus has claimed the lives of 81 horses,<sup>1</sup> including nine deaths in 2012 alone. With no known cure for Hendra, the Equivac HeV vaccine is positioned to become the most effective defence against this virus.

“This vaccine significantly decreases the risk of exposure to Hendra virus for horse owners, handlers and veterinarians. For that reason, the Australian Veterinary Association recommends that all horses be vaccinated against the Hendra virus,” said Dr Ben Gardiner, President, Australian Veterinary Association (AVA). “The vaccine will also help to protect the health of horses and is a major win for anyone working in the equine industry, including veterinarians. We encourage all horse owners to contact their veterinarian to schedule an Equivac HeV vaccine appointment.”

### *Rapid development of Equivac HeV by Australian-led international collaboration*

Equivac HeV vaccine was the result of an international collaboration. In Australia, Pfizer Animal Health has worked in close partnership with CSIRO's Australian Animal Health Laboratory (AAHL). Additionally, US organisations, the Uniformed Service University of the Health Sciences (USU) and The Henry M. Jackson Foundation for the Advancement of Military Medicine, Inc. (HJF) have also contributed to the development of this important vaccine.

Pfizer Animal Health has been involved from the early stages of the development process, contributing to formulation, industrialisation, production and distribution of the vaccine.

“Our involvement in the collaboration to develop Equivac HeV speaks to our determination to support the veterinary community and equine industry with effective vaccines to aid in the control of potentially life-threatening diseases such as the Hendra virus,” said Mike van Blommestein, Division Director, Pfizer Animal Health Australia.



Additionally, Pfizer Animal Health has also managed the formal regulatory approval process including those safety and efficacy trials required by the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) for the granting of permit approval, as well as fulfilling the requirements of the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service.

Moving forward, Pfizer Animal Health will oversee the training and accreditation of veterinarians working with the vaccine. The supply and maintenance of a national vaccine register for horses, requiring veterinarians to record details of a horse's location and vaccination status, will also be managed by Pfizer Animal Health.

"Equivac HeV vaccine exemplifies the scientific expertise and world-class facilities that we have access to here at Pfizer in Australia," said van Blommestein. "By investing in the development of innovative medicines and vaccines, we are not only supporting the local research and development industry, but also ensuring we can respond rapidly to emerging infectious diseases in Australia such as Hendra virus."

CSIRO has maintained a significant program of Hendra virus research since the virus was first identified in 1994 and has contributed critical technical knowhow and advice on the virus to the partnership. CSIRO also provided the safe handling of Hendra virus and testing of the Equivac HeV at its high containment facility in Geelong, Victoria, the only laboratory in the world capable of such high-risk work.

Leading the specialist team from CSIRO, Dr Deborah Middleton, veterinary pathologist, has a deep understanding of the need for an equine vaccine to aid in the prevention of the spread of Hendra virus.

"As a veterinarian, I have seen first-hand how Hendra has created difficult working conditions for my colleagues and any Australian who works with horses," said Dr Middleton. "A horse vaccine is crucial to breaking the cycle of Hendra virus transmission from flying foxes to horses and then to people, as it can prevent both the horse developing the disease and passing it on. For the first time, we have a Hendra specific tool that provides veterinarians with a greater level of safety when they come into contact with sick horses."

US partners USU and HJF also played an important role in the initial stages of the development of Equivac HeV vaccine. A research team at USU, led by Dr Christopher Broder, Ph.D., has worked for more than a decade to find preventative treatments for both Hendra and Nipah virus infections.

Contributing to this work, HJF provided intellectual property advice and guidance to Dr Broder's team to ensure the Hendra vaccine moved from the military to the civilian world.

#### *Vaccine roll-out*

As of 01 November 2012, Equivac HeV will be available for use by accredited veterinarians only, following the APVMA's approval of a Minor Use Permit earlier this



year. As a result, Pfizer Animal Health is currently working to supply Equivac HeV vaccine to those areas with the greatest need across Australia.

“We are collaborating with state based Chief Veterinary Officers and industry to ensure horses in areas evaluated as highest risk are supplied with the vaccine as a first priority,” advised van Blommestein.

While the introduction of a vaccine represents a significant step in countering the spread of Hendra virus, it is still important that veterinarians and those who work with horses take precautions to safeguard against infection.

“Although Equivac HeV will provide reassurance for Australians in contact with horses, owners should still be conscious of flying fox activity in their area,” added Dr Gardiner. “Anyone handling a sick horse should also continue to take important infection control precautions such as wearing personal protective equipment, quarantining sick horses and following good hygiene practices as a matter of routine.”

#### *About Hendra virus*

Hendra virus is a serious zoonotic infectious disease transmitted by flying foxes shedding the virus in their saliva, urine, aborted fetuses and/or reproductive fluids. Horses are thought to contract Hendra virus by ingesting feed or water contaminated with one of these sources of infection. The virus can also pass from animals to people and was first discovered in the Brisbane suburb of Hendra in 1994.

The Hendra virus horse vaccine project has received significant funding from State and Federal governments over the years. Most recently in 2011, the Intergovernmental Hendra Virus Taskforce was formed and the National Hendra Virus Research Program allocated funding to ensure critical timelines for vaccine development were maintained. Further development work and data such as adverse events from the use of the vaccine by accredited veterinarians post launch will be used to support the full registration of the vaccine by the APVMA.

For more information about Hendra virus, visit [www.Health4Horses.com.au](http://www.Health4Horses.com.au).

**For further information, pre-recorded video footage or an interview, please contact:**

**Katherine Barbeler  
Weber Shandwick**  
kbarbeler@webershandwick.com  
02 9994 4406 / 0439 941 632

**Andrés López-Varela  
Weber Shandwick**  
alopez-varela@webershandwick.com  
02 9994 4476 / 0405 631 945

**Hannah Rayment  
Weber Shandwick**  
hrayment@webershandwick.com  
02 9994 4492 / 0425 329 921

- ENDS -



#### **About Pfizer Animal Health Australia Pty Ltd**

Pfizer Animal Health is committed to the health and wellbeing of animals, through providing reliable and effective medications for companion animals. We take pride in being leaders in animal healthcare and providing innovative solutions to challenging health issues. We have a leading portfolio of medicines that prevent, treat and cure diseases across a broad range of therapeutic areas, and an industry-leading pipeline of promising new products in current and future areas of medicine. Pfizer has Australian-based research and manufacturing facilities as well as major locations in the US, Asia and Europe so we can deliver quality products with a focus on Australian needs. Pfizer Australia is the largest animal health company in Australia, with a base in Sydney and a large team of field based representatives and veterinarians.

#### **About CSIRO's Australian Animal Health Laboratory (AAHL)**

CSIRO's Australian Animal Health Laboratory (AAHL) is a front line defence, helping to protect Australia from the threat of exotic and emerging animal diseases. The Laboratory combines a capacity to rapidly diagnose animal diseases with high quality research.

AAHL is the most sophisticated laboratory in the world for the safe handling and containment of animal diseases and was custom-built to ensure the containment of the most infectious agents known. For the past quarter of a century the Laboratory has played a vital role in protecting Australia from biosecurity threats and risks posed by serious exotic and endemic diseases.

**Media contact:** Ms Emma Wilkins, Acting Communication Manager Biosecurity Flagship 0409 031 658; [Emma.Wilkins@csiro.au](mailto:Emma.Wilkins@csiro.au)

#### **About Henry M. Jackson Foundation for the Advancement of Military Medicine**

The Henry M. Jackson Foundation for the Advancement of Military Medicine, Inc. (HJF) is a private, not-for-profit organization established in 1983 and authorized by the U.S Congress to support medical research and education at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences and throughout the military medical community. For more information, visit [www.hjf.org](http://www.hjf.org)

#### **About Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences**

The Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences is the United States' federal health sciences university. USU students are primarily active-duty uniformed officers in the Army, Navy, Air Force and Public Health Service who have received specialized education in tropical and infectious diseases, preventive medicine, the neurosciences (to include TBI and PTSD), disaster response and humanitarian assistance, and acute trauma care. A large percentage of the university's nearly 5,000 physician and 500 advanced practice nursing alumni have provided support, leadership and expertise to operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and throughout the globe. The University is committed to excellence in research with graduate programs in biomedical sciences and public health open to civilian and military applicants that have awarded more than 400 doctoral and 800 masters degrees to date. For more information, visit [www.usuhs.mil](http://www.usuhs.mil).

#### **About Australian Veterinary Association**

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) is the only national organisation representing veterinarians in Australia. Its 7500 members come from all fields within the veterinary profession. Clinical practitioners work with companion animals, horses, farm animals, including cattle and sheep, and wildlife. Government veterinarians work with our animal health, public health and quarantine systems while other members work in industry for pharmaceutical and other commercial enterprises. We have members who work in research and teaching in a range of scientific disciplines. Veterinary students are also members of the Association.

---

<sup>i</sup> [http://www.daff.qld.gov.au/4790\\_11112.htm](http://www.daff.qld.gov.au/4790_11112.htm)