

Media Release

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Japanese encephalitis virus detection near Lockington

Agriculture Victoria is urging farmers to report any unexplained pig deaths, especially in unborn or newborn piglets, following a confirmed detection of Japanese encephalitis virus (JEV) at a single piggery near Lockington.

This mosquito borne disease has also recently been confirmed in piggeries in New South Wales and Queensland.

Victoria's Chief Veterinary Office Graeme Cooke said JEV has not been detected previously in pigs on mainland Australia.

"Japanese encephalitis virus causes reproductive failure in pigs, primarily through stillbirths and piglets that may show signs of central nervous system disease," said Dr Cooke.

"Japanese encephalitis virus can also be transmitted to humans through infected mosquitoes so we are working closely with the Department of Health to understand the implications and risks of human exposure. There is no risk to humans from eating pig meat.

"Horses can also be infected so owners should take precautions to protect their horses from mosquitoes.

"Extensive surveillance activities are underway as well as testing of previously collected samples to better understand the disease situation, and we will also be engaging veterinarians in the pig and horse industries, as well as industry peak bodies, to drive awareness of the disease."

Japanese encephalitis virus is not spread directly from pigs to people, and it also cannot spread from pig to pig.

Symptoms to be on the lookout for include stillbirths and the birth of weak piglets that may exhibit signs of central nervous system disease.

In horses, symptoms include lethargy, nervous signs or sometimes hyperexcitability.

Steps that pig and horse owners can take to protect their animals from mosquitos include the use of mosquito repellents and removing mosquito habitats.

Agriculture Victoria is working closely with animal health authorities nationally and the Victorian pig industry to determine the extent of the spread of this disease, and the appropriate way to protect the Australian pig industry.

Dr Cooke said farmers and veterinarians should remain vigilant for signs of Japanese encephalitis and should report any concerns to the Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline on 1800 675 888.