What are Hendra and Nipah viruses?
Hendra and Nipah viruses are uncommon viral infections that cause respiratory and neurologic disease. The Nipah virus affects pigs and humans while Hendra virus affects horses and humans. Hendra and Nipah viruses have been reported in Southeast Asia and Australia, not the United States.

How are Hendra and Nipah transmitted?
Close contact with tissues or bodily fluids of infected animals is required for infection. Hendra virus does not seem to be very contagious. Nipah virus appears to be more easily transmitted. It is not yet known how the diseases are transmitted to horses and pigs. Person-to-person transmission has not been reported.

What are the sources of the disease?
The disease appears to be carried by a family of bats called flying foxes (Pteropus sp). Infected flying foxes have been found in Southeast Asia, Australia, and Papua New Guinea. The flying foxes also live in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and some Pacific islands.

What are the risk factors?
Persons at risk include those who have traveled to areas where the disease is common; these include north, east and southeast Australia and Southeast Asia.

What is the incubation period?
Normally the incubation period is 4 to 18 days.

What are the common symptoms?
Symptoms of Hendra and Nipah virus include flu-like symptoms, including fever and muscle soreness. The diseases can also cause headache, drowsiness, and disorientation. In some cases infection can lead to coma and death.

What are the symptoms in animals?
Horses usually have an acute fever and appear sick. The most common symptoms in dogs include a loss of appetite, vomiting, and fever.

How are Hendra and Nipah virus infections diagnosed?
A blood test can detect the body’s response to infection.

How are Hendra and Nipah viruses treated?
No specific treatment besides supportive care has been identified.

How can infection be prevented?
Because the infection requires direct contact with infected tissues or bodily fluids, avoidance of these will prevent disease. If viral infection of an animal is suspected, precautions should be taken by wearing impermeable gloves, protective clothing, and face and eye shields.

Additional Information:
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

This fact sheet is meant to provide basic information. For specific health concerns please contact your physician or veterinarian. Updated 2005.