

will be necessary to interpret the usefulness of new infection control interventions.

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## Newly Identified Virus Kills Trainer and 14 Horses in Australia

by **Gina Pugliese, RN, MS**  
**Medical News Editor**

In what is believed to be the quickest discovery in veterinary medicine, scientists have identified a new virus just 12 days after an outbreak in Brisbane, Australia, killed a trainer and 14 horses. The virus, which has not been named, belongs to the morbilliform family, which includes the measles virus. It is believed to be the first new virus in the family to attack humans since the measles virus. It leaps from animal to human, where it proved fatal in the first case detected. It causes an illness that includes high fever, interstitial pneumonia, and severe damage to the blood vessels.

Government scientists were called in to identify the virus after it had killed a few horses and infected two humans. One of the humans, a 49-year-old horse trainer, died from complications of interstitial pneumonia after 6 days. The second, a 40-year-old stable hand who helped care for a dying mare, developed a severe influenza-like illness but recovered. During the investigation, the scientists ruled out the recently discovered Hanta strain, anthrax, and poisoning. Tissue cultures began showing evidence of viral growth, and examination of the growth using electron microscopy revealed the herringbone structure characteristic of the morbilliform virus. Up to this time,

no member of this family of viruses had caused disease in both horses and humans. The virus was identified in the lungs of four of the dead horses and in none of the healthy horses. After injecting tissue from the sick horses into two healthy horses, they became agitated and developed severe respiratory illness. The same virus also was isolated from the kidneys of the trainer.

The morbilliform group of viruses includes the canine distemper, seal plague, and rinderpest viruses in addition to the measles virus.

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