

# Preventing Equestrian Injuries

## Facts on horse-related injuries

### *High risk of serious injury*

- ◆ Equestrian activities have one of the highest risks of serious injury and death compared with other sports (including motorcycle and car racing).

### *Horse riding versus horse handling*

- ◆ The vast majority of horse-related injuries (approximately 80%) occur whilst riding.
- ◆ About 20% of injuries occur during horse handling activities (eg. driving, grooming, feeding, shoeing, leading) and unrelated activities, such as playing in the vicinity of a horse.

### *The cause and type of injuries*

- ◆ Falls from the horse are the major cause of injury (up to 80%), followed by crushing injuries inflicted by the horse and kicks.
- ◆ The major cause of death and severe injury in horse riders is head injury resulting from a fall from the horse. Many of these riders were not wearing a protective helmet, or were wearing an inadequate helmet, or one which dislodged from the head during a fall.
- ◆ Less severe injuries are predominantly bruises, cuts, abrasions (particularly to the face), fractures (mainly to the arm), and joint sprains.
- ◆ Injuries to children tend to be more severe than those to adults.

### *Who is injured?*

- ◆ Children and adolescents are the most commonly injured group, particularly young girls (10-19 years) due to their greater participation in equestrian activities.

### *Non-riding injuries*

- ◆ Horse-related non-riding injuries are also a serious problem, particularly for children.
- ◆ The main injuries in children are to the head and face (skull fractures, concussion, cuts, bruises), and in adults are to the arm and fingers.
- ◆ Many of these injuries result from kicking by the horse.

### *References*

- ◆ Williams F, Ashby K. Horse-related injuries. *Hazard*. 1995, June, No. 23. Victorian Injury Surveillance System. Monash University Accident Research Centre.
- ◆ Watt GM, Finch CF. Preventing equestrian injuries: Locking the stable door. *Sports Medicine* 1996; 22(3): 187-197.

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## Safety tips for horse riding and handling

A combination of common sense and caution is needed when dealing with horses. To avoid injuries constant awareness of a horse's strength, nature and behaviour are needed. Get to know your horse, respect it and be alert to things which may frighten it.

### *Selecting an appropriate horse is the first step*

- ◆ Choose a horse to match the rider's age, skill, experience and size, as well one which is suitable for the specific riding task. Select older horses for novice riders - they are quieter and more predictable.
- ◆ Consult an experienced rider to aid in this selection - it's a worthwhile investment.

### *Supervision and education of novice riders is essential*

- ◆ Supervise children and novice riders around horses and when riding at all times.
- ◆ Start safety education early. Parents of child riders also need to be knowledgeable about horse safety.
- ◆ Well-conducted lessons, in safe surrounds, from experienced instructors, are an ideal learning environment.

### *Riding helmets prevent injury*

- ◆ Wear a protective helmet whenever riding - they can prevent head injuries and therefore many horse riding deaths.
- ◆ Riding helmets should comply with Australian Standards. They should have either no peak or a collapsible one, and be worn securely fastened.
- ◆ Ensure small children routinely wear a helmet around horses - kicks can result in severe head injuries.

### *Increase safety with reliable riding equipment*

- ◆ Always wear sturdy boots in the vicinity of horses - if trodden on, feet are easily crushed by the horse's weight. When mounted wear riding boots (smooth soled, heeled, elastic-sided or long).
- ◆ Use stirrups 2-3cm wider than the boot. Consider safety stirrups for children and novice riders. A foot caught in a stirrup can result in dragging.
- ◆ Routinely check reins, saddle and other horse tack for condition. Carry out maintenance where needed.
- ◆ Competitive riders can consider body protectors which may reduce the severity of soft tissue injuries. Face guards and knee pads are appropriate for polo players. Gloves can provide some hand protection.

### *Handle horses with care and respect*

- ◆ Always exercise caution around the hind legs of horse - they are well designed for kicking.
- ◆ Handle ropes and reins in a manner to avoid loops which could trap fingers.
- ◆ Separate small children from horses. Children should not play in the vicinity of horses.

### *Make safety a priority at organised meetings and competitions*

- ◆ Ensure mandatory use of helmets complying with Australian Standards by competitors.
- ◆ Use energy absorbing ground surfaces where possible. Check and maintain ground conditions and fencing.
- ◆ Always have on-the-spot injury treatment facilities available (first aid, paramedical or medical personnel).

### *Medical conditions need not be a deterrent*

- ◆ Horses can be enjoyed by anyone! Consult your doctor for advice on specific medical conditions.

#### *For further information contact:*

Equestrian Federation of Australia Vic Branch Inc. Royal Show Grounds, Epsom Road, Ascot Vale, Vic. 3032. Tel. (03) 9376 1966  
Pony Club of Victoria. 'Irving House', PO Box 2025, North Brighton, 3186. Tel. (03) 9596 4778  
Riding for the Disabled Association of Victoria. 87 Orrong Cresc., Nth. Caulfield, Vic. 3161. Tel: (03) 9527 7285  
Accident Research Centre, Monash University. Building 70, Wellington Road, Clayton, Vic. 3168. Tel: (03) 9905 1808