

THINKFIRST CANADA'S HORSEBACK RIDING INJURY PREVENTION TIPS

Research suggests that the risk of a fatal injury while horseback riding is higher than for sports such as hockey and football and that is why it is important to think *first* before riding. Here are ThinkFirst Canada's top tips for reducing your risk of sustaining a catastrophic injury while riding a horse. This information is taken from Chapter 44 "Horseback Riding" in the ThinkFirst book entitled ***Catastrophic Injuries in Sports and Recreation: Causes and Prevention – A Canadian Study*** edited by Charles H. Tator and published by the University of Toronto Press in 2008.

TOP TIPS:

Helmets

- Before using a helmet check the label to make sure that it has been ASTM / SEI approved. Currently there is no Canadian Standards Association (CSA) standard for equestrian helmets. American and British standards are the internationally recognized ones for these items.
- Each helmet should have a safety harness bolted to it, including a strap that comes under the chin and is fastened by a buckle or snap.
- Make sure the helmet fits snugly against the head.
- Some helmets have vents to allow air to flow through to keep a rider's head cool.
- The helmet may have detachable lining and fitting pads, and visors.
- Discard damaged helmets or helmets that do not meet current safety accreditation standards.

Vests

- Body protectors, such as vests, are designed to reduce trauma from blunt impacts and falls.
- Vests provide some protection to the trunk by reducing the severity of soft tissue injuries and rib fractures.
- SEI has recently approved certified equestrian protective vests.

Riding Boots

- Always wear a boot with a heel to stop the foot from slipping through the stirrup.
- Break-away or flexible stirrups can prevent the foot from being caught in the iron. They should be considered for small children, beginners, and for riders wearing heavier winter riding boots. It is important that the boot fit the stirrup. There must be a minimum of 1cm of space between the boot and the stirrup iron on each side of the boot.

Gloves

- Gloves designed for riding ensure a secure grip of the reins, and offer protection from chafing as well as warmth in cold weather.

Riders

- Have knowledge of how the horse behaves, and be aware of the horse's movements and find a safe way to approach the horse.
- Be physically and mentally fit – being well rested and focused is key to participating in horseback riding safely.
- Make sure that the horse is properly equipped for the ride. All tack and equipment should be checked before the ride.
- Learn how to fall properly – falling using a 'tuck and roll' technique may help to reduce injuries.
- Beginner riders should take riding lessons – riding lessons help to promote safety practices. Lessons are of continuing benefit to accomplished riders.

Parents

- Get educated about equestrian safety – this will help with recognizing how injuries occur and how to prevent them.
- Make sure that your child is wearing the appropriate equipment and that the equipment fits properly.
- Choose a horse that is suitable for your child – get an experienced or trained horse person to assist with this process.
- Make sure you are supervising your child or that your child is riding in a setting supervised by someone reliable and knowledgeable.

Coaches and Trainers

- Keep current with changes and trends that affect the equestrian community. Their interests and those of your clientele depend on it. Regardless of your experience in the equine field, professional reevaluation and continuing education have become the reality for dedicated practitioners on all walks of life.
- Have a good knowledge of horses, and always select an animal appropriate to the rider's size and ability level.
- Assisting parents with purchasing horses for their children is an important role. Making sure that parents choose a horse suitable for their child is essential.
- Never permit a rider on a horse unless he or she is wearing the appropriate equipment and that the equipment fits properly.
- Make sure that the horse is wearing the right equipment – equipment that does not fit the horse properly may also cause injury to the rider.
- Always supervise the child or adult while riding. In this study, the majority of injuries occurred in unsupervised settings. This suggests that riding in unsupervised settings should be avoided.

- Be a role model and set a good example by riding safely and maintaining high standards of stable management. Setting realistic goals for clients and conducting business in an ethical manner is essential.

Organizations

- Have a written policy outlining safety procedures.
- Strictly enforce the rules and regulations of the policy. It is recommended that a safety committee be established for this purpose.
- Horseback riders and parents must respect the rules implemented by the organizations.
- A record of all injuries should be kept. This should be reviewed periodically by the safety committee to determine activities or areas that may need attention.
- The first consideration in the planning of any equestrian activity or event is safety.
- Regularly review safety policy

DID YOU KNOW?

- Horses can reach speeds up to 60km/hour, resulting in more injuries per hour in the saddle than during motorcycling or auto racing.
- Per 1000 injuries in equestrian activities, 2.1 are catastrophic.
- Data for 1996 from the Canadian Hospitals Injury Reporting Database found that at highest risk for injury were the 10-14 years and the 5-9 years age groups
- Falling or being thrown off the horse is the most common mechanism of injury and is associated with the risk of head injury.
- A study by Thomson and von Hollen found that two thirds of equestrian related injuries resulted from the horse's behaviour and one third from riders taking risks or failing to remain alert.
- Lack of supervision is a risk factor that can contribute to injury.
- Approximately 70% of equestrian deaths are the result of head injury.
- Closed head injuries are one of the most common equestrian injuries and are frequently associated with not wearing a helmet.

Remember: thinkfirst.ca before you play!