

IMPORTANT INFO



Traditionally, English riders wear helmets and Western riders wear cowboy hats. Although this stereotype has begun to fade, the equestrian world remains steeped in years of tradition and a stigma against wearing helmets in some disciplines still exists, even for juniors. Statistics prove that requiring riders to wear

safety helmets reduces the number of severe head injuries and yet many riders still participate in lessons, trail rides and competitions without any head protection.

Statistics

The statistics on head injuries while horseback riding are alarming and should be a “wake-up call” to parents, coaches, trainers, competition organizers, insurance companies and equestrian governing bodies.

- Horseback riders are hospitalized due to severe head injuries more often than those involved in hockey, football, boxing and soccer.
- It is the height from where the rider falls that jeopardizes head trauma. A fall from 2 feet (60 cm) can cause permanent brain damage and a horse elevates a rider up to 8 feet (3 metres) or more above the ground.
- A human skull can be shattered by an impact of only 7-10 kph while horses can gallop at speeds up to 65 kph.
- Riders age 10-14 are most likely to be involved in an accident with a horse.
- The most common reason among riders for hospitalization and equestrian related deaths are head injuries.
- Horseback riders have a higher serious injury rate than motorcycle riding: a

motorcyclist may suffer a serious injury every 7,000 hours of riding, a horseback rider may suffer a serious injury every 350 hours of riding

Tragic Accidents

Elizabeth Hader, a 10 year-old girl was killed when thrown from a horse that spooked at a public trail riding facility. She suffered severe head injuries and York Regional Police confirmed that she was not wearing a helmet.

Patricia Moore, an experienced barrel racer and rodeo contestant, died from severe head injuries in 2005 when her horse stumbled and fell to the ground after leaving the ring. Pat was not wearing a helmet.

Responsibility



It is up to the horse industry itself to make the necessary changes surrounding helmet use while horseback riding. Riders should never feel that they must sacrifice wearing a safety helmet in order to be ‘part of the crowd’ or to be successful in competition.

Parents, coaches and trainers must start setting the example by wearing an approved safety helmet at all times and, from here, children and clients will follow. **Old practices remain intact only when no one challenges tradition.**

It is recommended that you should never buy a used helmet.

Replacement on a regular basis should be part of your safety plan for a facility or individual. Serious damage to a helmet cannot always be seen or felt. Any helmet which has been in a hard fall should be inspected by the manufacturer or destroyed and replaced.

Some of the signs of hard use in a helmet, and a need for replacement, are:

1. Harness pulling loose from the helmet;
2. Squeeze clips with broken teeth;
3. White helmets turning yellow;
4. Black velvet helmets turning beige;
5. Surface cracks, holes or dents;
6. Chunks missing from the liner;
7. Liner squashed down in places;
8. Shell or liner cracked through.

Safety Standards

Safety helmets must be certified for equestrian use in order to provide the necessary protection.

The American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) writes safety standards for products that are risk related and the Safety Equipment Institute (SEI) ensures that the manufacturers comply with the standards. Certified helmets are put through a number of tests specifically related to horseback riding, such as concussion from certain heights and on sharp edges, temperature, moisture, and more. Other types of helmets, including bike and hockey helmets, are inadequate as they are certified for their specific sport alone.



QUICK FACT SHEET

1. Athletes involved in horse riding are more likely to suffer head trauma than those involved in football, boxing or soccer.
2. Head injuries are the most common reason for admission to hospital or even death among riders.
3. Most injuries occur during pleasure riding.
4. A fall from 2 feet (60 cm) can cause permanent brain damage. A horse elevates a rider 8 feet (3 meters) or more above ground.
5. A human skull can be shattered by an impact of 7-10 kph. Horses can gallop at 65 kph.
6. A rider who has had one head injury has a 40% chance of suffering a second head injury. Children, teens and young adults are most vulnerable to sudden death from a second impact syndrome.
7. Death is not the only serious outcome of unprotected head injuries. Those who survive with brain injury may suffer epilepsy, intellectual and memory impairment, and personality changes.
8. Hospital costs for an acute head injury can be in the range of \$2000 per day. Lifetime extended care costs may easily exceed \$3 million. There is no funding for rehabilitation outside the medical setting.
9. Helmets work! Most deaths from head injury can be prevented by wearing ASTM SEI approved riding helmets that fit and are worn correctly.
10. Racing organizations require helmets and as a result jockeys now suffer less head injuries than pleasure riders. The US Pony Club lowered their head injury rate 29% with mandatory helmet use.
11. The BC Medical Association, Canadian Medical Association, American Medical Association and the American Equestrian Association recommend approved helmets be worn on all rides by all equestrians.

Courtesy of the BC Medical Association.

SELECTING A HELMET

Riding helmets made to the ASTM F1163 standard and certified by the Safety Equipment Institute (SEI) are considered to be the world's best head protection for horseback riders. ASTM/SEI helmets come in a variety of types and colours.

No helmet can do its job if it doesn't fit properly. It must be snug but not uncomfortably tight. Every ASTM/SEI manufacturer includes fitting and care instructions with a new helmet. The practical lifespan of a helmet is five to six years.

When a helmet fits correctly, it sits about an inch above the eyebrows, squarely on the head with the brim straight ahead. The harness must be fastened so there is direct firm contact with the jaw or chin, depending on the model and the manufacturer's instructions. Most harnesses are adjustable on the sides or at the back as well. This should be adjusted to fit as closely to the head as possible with no gaps or lumps. To check actual fit, place one hand on top of the helmet and rock it backward and forward, and side to side. The scalp should move with the helmet, which is shown by the eyebrows moving.

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HORSEBACK RIDING HELMET SAFETY

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