

Horse Riding

Horses have the speed, strength and ability to cause injury. Riders need training and skill, and the concentration and ability to handle unexpected situations. Clothing and equipment are important for safe riding and handling of horses.

Spot the hazard

Look for hazards relating to rider training and experience, the horse's training and temperament, hazardous terrain and weather conditions, difficult roundup work, clothing, footwear and riding equipment.

Assess the risk

Check identified hazards for likelihood and severity of injury or harm. Consider the background, training and experience of horses and riders. Where risk of injury or harm is considered likely, plan safer procedures.

Make the changes

Here are some suggested ways of reducing risk.

- Plan ahead - consider safe work practices. Get assistance if necessary.
- Wear appropriate gear - leather soled riding boots are recommended as they are designed to slip easily out of the stirrup in case of an accident. Do not use boots with half-sole repairs. Jeans, jodhpurs or long trousers will prevent chafing, and a hat will provide protection from the sun.
- An approved riding helmet (polo or pony club style) should be worn where above average risk is involved, e.g. inexperienced riders, horse-breaking etc.
- Know your limitations, and avoid riding horses that are likely to exploit those limitations.

The equipment

- Keep bridles and bits in good condition, and fitted so the horse is comfortable.
- Ensure saddles and girths are kept in good repair - stirrup leathers, girth straps and syringes should be well oiled and checked regularly.
- Stirrup irons should be of a size that allows the foot to slip in and out freely, without allowing it to slip through.
- Keep saddle cloths free from burrs and other foreign material.
- Horses vary in conformation, temperament, ability and levels of training. Some require breastplates or cruppers to keep the saddle in place, and running rings, nosebands or head checks to keep their head and neck in a position for easy control.
- A breastplate is a good safeguard in case the girth breaks or comes loose.

The horse

- Great care is needed when galloping close to a beast at high speed. It is extremely dangerous to allow a horse to touch a running beast behind the shoulder. The horse can fall by touching the beast's hind legs, or from the beast turning completely under the horse's neck.
- In stock yards, be careful riding under gate caps. Some are too low for the horse and rider to pass under safely.
- High speed chases on horses can cause accidents - where practicable, use dogs to control stock.
- Extra care should be taken when riding in boggy or slippery conditions.
- Riders should be matched to horses that are within their handling capabilities. Do not assign an inexperienced person with a flighty, uneducated horse.
- Mounting is easier if the horse is facing uphill.
- If there is no yard to ride in, frisky horses should be taken to a creek bed or sandy area. The horse finds it harder to buck in sand, and the rider finds it softer to fall on.

Difficult horses

- It is not advisable to persevere with horses that are likely to buck, bolt or become uncontrollable. Some tolerance however is generally accepted during the breaking-in and early stages of training.

- If a horse is likely to buck, it is best to saddle it and give it some exercise prior to mounting. This can be carried out in a number of ways, e.g. by "lunging" or leading it from another horse. The horse should then be mounted and ridden in a small yard before being ridden in an unconfined area.
- If a horse is likely to bolt, it should first be ridden in a yard. If a horse bolts in an unconfined area, the rider should remain calm and gradually circle the horse until the horse comes under control.
- Riders should remain alert and in a position of control while mounted - adjusting equipment is a job to be carried out from the ground.