

# Fact Sheet

## Horse Riding



### What is horse riding?

Horse riding is a leisure or sporting activity where a person sits on the back of a pony or horse – either with a saddle or without (bareback), and through learned techniques encourages the horse to either move (at various speeds), jump or perform specialised manoeuvres (equestrian).



Horses are large animals; some weigh as much as 500kg and are up to three metres tall, and are capable of moving at high speeds. Awareness of a horse's strength, nature and behaviour and use of commonsense and caution is needed to avoid or reduce the risk of injury.

Although horse riding is an activity enjoyed by all ages, it can cause serious injury in children due to the unpredictable nature of horses.

### How may a child be injured?



#### Falls

- Children can sustain serious head injuries, spinal injuries, fractures, chest and abdominal injuries when falling from a horse.

#### Traction Injuries

- Children can suffer traction injuries (from being pulled or jerked suddenly, i.e. soft tissue injuries such as dislocated/sprained shoulders/elbows/wrists, etc) while leading a horse.



#### Cuts and bruises

- Children may sustain cuts, bruises or more serious injuries if bitten, stamped on, kicked or dragged by a horse.

### How common are these injuries?

Most injuries occur whilst riding a horse but can also occur during handling, grooming, feeding and unrelated activities such as playing in the vicinity of a horse. Upper limb fractures and lower limb fractures are the most common injuries that children experience from horses.



A study conducted between January 1988 and December 1999, in two major Children's Hospitals, found that 232 children were admitted to hospital with horse-related trauma.<sup>1</sup> Over a twelve year period 6 deaths were reported to the NSW Paediatric Trauma Death (NPTD) Registry.<sup>1</sup> Of those injured, 65% were girls and 75% of children were injured while riding. Falls were the most common cause of injury (76.3% of cases). Of the children studied at the Children's Hospital at Westmead only 38% were recorded as wearing helmets. The majority of deaths resulted from severe head injuries.<sup>1</sup>



### Is there a Law or Australian Standard for horse riding?

It is recommended that manufacturers of helmets for horse riding and horse-related activities follow the Australian Standard (AS/NZS 3838:2006). This is a voluntary standard that manufacturers are not required to meet, however The Children's Hospital at Westmead and Kaleidoscope suggest that you purchase a helmet that meets this standard. If you choose

# Fact Sheet

## Horse Riding



to purchase a helmet that does not meet the Australian Standard, please keep in mind the safety reminders below:

Kaleidoscope and The Children's Hospital at Westmead recommend that an Australian Standard certified riding helmet – which must be fastened whenever riding – be replaced after any significant impact.

### Remember

- Be aware of the potential dangers whilst riding, leading or simply being near a horse and ensure a child is aware of these dangers.
- Ensure children wear appropriate safety gear including a Standards Australia approved riding helmet.
- Small children should not be allowed to play around horses. If you do choose to allow your child to play in the vicinity of horses, ensure they wear a helmet as kicks can result in severe and sometimes fatal head injuries.
- Sturdy boots should always be worn when near horses to prevent feet being crushed if trodden on.
- Safety stirrups are recommended for children and beginner riders. Dragging can occur when feet are caught in a stirrup.
- Reins, saddles and other horse equipment should be regularly checked and maintained.
- Children should be supervised by an adult, at all times, whilst they are with horses. Increase a child's awareness of the potential dangers of horse riding and handling.
- Always teach children to be cautious around the back legs of a horse.
- Always choose a suitable horse to match the rider's age, skill, experience and size as well as a one which is suitable for a specific riding activity.
- Select older horses for inexperienced riders as they are often quieter and more predictable.
- Always have experienced instructors supervise lessons.

---

<sup>1</sup> Holland A., Roy G., Goh V., Ross F., Keneally J., and Cass, D, Horse-related injuries in children. *The Medical Journal of Australia*, 2001; 175:609-612