



Spot it Safety



Objective:

Participants will identify and classify horse-related safety scenarios by engaging in interactive activities to develop awareness of common risks and the role of proper gear, environment, and equipment checks in preventing injuries, both on the ground and while riding.

By the end of the lesson, equestrians will demonstrate their understanding by accurately sorting scenarios into Safe and Caution categories and discussing preventative strategies for improving safety around horses.

Warm Up Activity "Neigh or Nay?"

See the included printable material:

Set up 2 buckets (or bins):

- One labeled SAFE
- One labeled CAUTION

Use scenario cards to have your equestrians take guesses as to if they think the scenario is safe or if there is caution.

- See attached printable option for the activity
- Use collected photos from your own barn sample ideas included in handout
- Encourage discussion

Safety for People

More than 65,500 people are seen in U.S. emergency departments annually for horse-related injuries. Of these, the vast majority (89%) occur while mounted, 6% while unmounted, and 2% during mounting or dismounting.

The most common mechanisms of injury while mounted are falling or being thrown from the horse (67–74% of all horse-related injuries), and bucking/rearing/spooking (12%) For unmounted individuals, injuries most frequently result from being kicked (42%) or stepped on/trampled (27%)



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The Role of Rider Safety Gear

Equestrian activities are both rewarding and inherently risky, making proper safety gear essential for every rider. Proper safety gear—including a certified helmet and proper boots are non-negotiables but considering things like long pants, a safety vest, gloves, and medical ID—additionally can protect riders from injury and ensure quick help in emergencies.

Whether you're a beginner or a seasoned equestrian, understanding and using the right safety gear is a critical part of responsible riding.

Optional add - For energy and attention getter - stand on a mounting block and drop an egg or a watermelon and relate it to head protection.

Why Helmets Matter

One out of every nine horseback -related injuries seen in an emergency room is a head related injury. Wearing a certified, well-fitted helmet is the most effective way to reduce the risk and severity of head injuries in horseback riding. American Medical Equestrian Association, ASTM/SEI-certified helmets reduce horse-related head injuries by 30 percent and severe head injuries by 50 percent.

Wearing a properly fitted, ASTM/SEI-certified riding helmet reduces the risk of fatal head injury by up to 80%.

Idea: Use small candy to demonstrate percentages represented



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What to teach about helmets:

1. ASTM /SEI standards testing

- Impact Tests: Helmets are dropped onto both flat and pointed anvils from specific heights to simulate various impact scenarios. The helmet must absorb and distribute impact forces to protect the head.
- Penetration Test: Ensures that sharp objects cannot pierce the helmet.
- Retention System Test: Verifies that the helmet's harness or strap system keeps the helmet securely on the head during a fall and does not stretch excessively.
- Visor Test: Checks that the visor will break away or flex without causing facial injury.
- Environmental Conditioning: All tests are performed after the helmet has been subjected to extreme conditions—frozen to -20°F, heated to over 120°F, and submerged in water overnight—to ensure performance in real-world environments

2. Safe Helmet Fit - Here is a Video of helmet fit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eufCjLGMy7g> (also see handout)

3. Expiration date - Each manufacturer has a recommended lifespan for their helmets. Most equestrian helmets should be replaced within 5 years.

4. Learn about inspecting it for damage: You can use the 1st minute of this video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ofXFbBCX8rI>

5. It is not recommended to buy or acquire used helmets

6. Helmet care - how to properly handle and store helmets. How to clean them per the manufactures recommendations. Do not wash them in a dishwasher!



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Activity: Helmet Scramble

- Gather several helmets. Use other students, usable and unusable helmets. If possible, include different type of helmet like a bike helmet, motorcycle helmet, etc.
- Scramble helmets and have riders inspect for: (Worksheet included)
 - ASTM/SEI label
 - Expiration or manufacture date
 - Cracks/damage
 - Correct fit
 - Discuss how to store them, clean them (look at manufactures guidelines)
- Show a short video of how helmets are tested (slow-motion impact videos are very engaging).
- Game idea: Have all the helmets lined up and the riders will grab a helmet other than their own to try on and discuss fit, who fits the best? (see included worksheet)

Additional viewing: Helmet Lab research video by Virginia Tech - https://youtu.be/MdsKBRebjgc?si=wgzpz42_PMt2Kl5mZ

Rider Boots

Proper riding boots are essential for safety, starting with preventing your foot from slipping through the stirrup—an important feature that reduces the risk of being dragged in the event of a fall. Just as importantly, boots protect your feet from being stepped on by a horse, which can weigh anywhere from 500 to 2,000 pounds. Because horses can't see directly beneath themselves, accidental steps are common, and without sturdy, structured boots, your toes could suffer serious injury.



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Importance of Boots

1. **Prevent Foot Slipping Through the Stirrup:** Boots should have a prominent, flat heel (at least one inch) to reduce the chances of the foot sliding too far through the stirrup. This reduces the risk of being dragged if you fall and your foot gets caught.
2. **Provide Toe and Foot Protection:** Structured boots with hard or reinforced toe caps protect your toes and the top of your foot from being stepped on by a horse, which can cause serious injury.
3. **Ankle Support:** Sturdy boots provide support to your ankles, helping prevent strain and injuries both while riding and when working around horses. **Proper Sole:** Smooth, hard soles are recommended to reduce the chances of getting caught in the stirrup.

(Activity on boots/stirrups listed under stirrups)

Other equipment for equestrian safety

Gloves

Help with grip, prevent rope burn Gloves are an important safety accessory for equestrians for several key reasons:

- Enhanced Grip
- Protects the hands

Demo ideas:

- hanging up a rope and having riders slide their hands down the rope to feel the friction
- or have your riders rub hands together really fast to create friction

Body protectors

Body protectors (rigid vests) and can be required in some of the high-risk disciplines such as cross-country eventing, racing, and rodeo. These vests help reduce the risk of chest and abdominal injuries. Newer air jackets have also become popular with a releasing attachment to the saddle that inflates upon detachment.

- Look for applicable standards for body protectors such as ASTM F1937 / ASTM F2681, EN 13158, BETA 2018
- Proper fit is essential for effectiveness. Body protectors should be fitted by a trained professional, ideally at a reputable outlet.
- They should mold to the rider's body, allow for freedom of movement, and be comfortable over riding attire,



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Riding Independently

Consider a Medical ID badge

- Suggest that riders wear medical identification, such as a wristband, listing critical information like allergies, medications, blood type, and pre-existing conditions to help first responders deliver faster, more accurate care in the event of an accident where the rider may be unconscious or unable to communicate.

Communication and Supervision

- Emphasize that someone should always know when and where a rider is riding and when they are expected to finish which helps ensure a quick response if something goes wrong.

Weather Awareness and Safety

- Heat: Risk of heat stress and dehydration. Encourage hydration, provide shade, and schedule rides during cooler parts of the day.
- Cold: Risk of hypothermia and frostbite. Recommend dressing in layers, and adjusting warm-up and cool-down times.
- Rain/Mud: Creates slippery footing and increases risk of slips and falls; also affects grip on tack and reins. Suggest slowing pace and using caution.
- Storms: Include hazards like wind, flying debris, and lightning. Stress the importance of monitoring weather warnings, securing horses, and seeking shelter promptly.



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Part 2 - Equipment Safety

Spotting Equipment safety concerns

Tack and equipment issues were the **second largest category of preventable accidents** (after horse spooking), accounting for 19% of reported injuries.

These include:

- Broken tack (stirrups, girths, bridles)
- Saddle slipping
- Poor fit or incorrect use of tack
- Skipped or inadequate safety checks

Key prevention strategy: Perform a thorough pre-ride tack check:

Tack checks are especially critical if someone else tacked up the horse.

Stirrups:

Discussion points:

- **Size** - Looking at the foot in the stirrup correctly with the iron sitting on the ball, the sides of the iron Too big increases the chances of the foot slipping through the iron. Too small has the risk of the foot getting trapped. Aim for about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch on each side.
- **Stirrup Iron Styles**
 - There are a verity of stirrup irons from safety to standard. Know that there is no current standardized third party testing.
- **Stirrup bar** - If the stirrup bar on the saddle has a hinge design make sure the bar is left in the down (open) position. This allows for the stirrup leather to detach in the event of a fall with rider entrapment..



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Activities:

Boots/stirrups

Pull out different stirrup iron types - boot and shoes types

Have riders pair stirrup size with boot size. Bring in extra boots or even 'unsafe' shoes

You could have one person hold the stirrup on the ground and have a rider put their foot in the stirrup and experiment with escaping the stirrup.

- Discuss the importance of the placement on the foot in the iron for riding.
- Discuss different types of stirrups (see handout included) - note there is currently no third party testing or standards for stirrup safety.

Practice Leather Care:

Discuss

- Damage and cracking
- Dry
- Over oiled

Inspect and explore

- Reins
- Saddle billets
- Stirrup leathers
- Fit/Stitching/Elastics/Buckles
- Check stitching on bridles, reins, girths
- Elastic on girths can get old worn out and break

BINGO FOR THE SAFETY AWARE RIDER

Making the environment 100% accident free is impossible but learning how to identify things that reduce or increase the risk of an accident or injury is an important job for all equestrians to be aware of at all times.

Something the horse can get caught on	Something sharp or pointy	An alert horse	A place where someone may make quick movements	Something that a horse should not eat
A place you take horses where they would have a harder time to seeing	Something that might make a loud sound	A spot there there is a hole to avoid	A stirrup iron that doesn't properly fit your boots	A piece of leather in good condition
A relaxed horse	Hear a horse chewing		A object or color hard for horses's to see	A helmet manufacture date
A first aid kit	Something that could fall	A gate or door with a hard latch	A fire extinguisher	Two ways to exit horses
A place to safely tie a horse	Identify a potential hazzard in the riding area	A part of fencing that will need replaced next	A place where a person could get injured	Something to protect a person in the barn other then a helmet

Safety Detective

A Photo Is Worth A Thousand Words
Over the next week take photos of things around your barn, identifying things that are safe and unsafe for the "Safety Detective Game"

Use these real photos to make the game more relatable and applicable to your environment. If that is not possible, then you the scenario cards below or photos included.

Photos are going to create more discussion opportunities than verbal prompts. Plus, your equestrians might identify hazards that you might not have thought of yet! I have included some photos here that you may use in place of photographing your environment.

SAFE



DANGER



Opening a gate or door slightly to lead a horse through

Hanging a feed or water bucket with the snap opening facing the wall.

Attentive to the horse's hoof and schedule regular trimming.

Reins resting evenly on a horse's neck with no one holding them

Hay being fed off the ground

Offering water to a hot horse that just finished exercising

Hanging a feed or water bucket with the snap opening facing the wall.

Empty jump cups installed above the top rail

Horse cross tied to a bit

Tightening before mount

A halter hanging near or on the ground still attached to a cross tie

Saddles and Tack get examined before/after rides for repair

Boots with 1 inch heel that fits in the iron with 3cm on each side

Leading from the cross ties to the stall by holding the halter

Horse is tied to a horizontal fence board by a lead rope using a quick release knot

Leading with a cotton lead rope wrapped gently around the leaders hand.

















