

HEADS UP
CONCUSSION





FACT SHEET FOR YOUTH EQUESTRIAN TRAINER/COACHES

One of the main jobs of a youth equestrian trainer/coach is keeping riders safe. This fact sheet has information to help you protect riders from concussion or other serious brain injury, learn how to spot a concussion, and know what to do if a concussion occurs.

WHAT IS A CONCUSSION?

A concussion is a type of traumatic brain injury—or TBI—caused by a bump, blow or jolt to the head or by a hit to the body that causes the head and brain to move quickly back and forth. This fast movement can cause the brain to bounce around or twist in the skull, creating chemical changes in the brain and sometimes stretching and damaging the brain cells.

HOW CAN I HELP KEEP RIDERS SAFE?

Sports are a great way for children and teens to stay healthy and can help them do well in school. As a youth equestrian trainer or coach, your actions create a culture for safety and can help lower a rider's chance of getting a concussion or other serious injury. Here are some ways you can help keep your riders safe:

Talk with riders about the importance of reporting a concussion:

- Talk with riders about any concerns they might have about reporting their concussion symptoms. Make sure to tell them that safety comes first and you expect them to tell you and their parent(s) if they think they have a concussion.

Create a culture of safety at competitions and practices:

- Enforce the rules of the sport for safety and sportsmanship.
- Ensure riders wear protective headgear at all times while mounted on a horse and keep the helmet on while riding and dismounting.

Keep up-to-date on concussion information:

- Review your state and governing organization's concussion guidelines and protocols.
- Take a training course on concussion. CDC offers concussion training at no cost at www.cdc.gov/HEADSUP.
- Download CDC's HEADS UP app or a list of concussion signs and symptoms that you can keep on hand.

Check out equipment and riding venues:

- When possible, ensure that equipment (such as safety cups), are available and in good condition.

Keep emergency contact information handy:

- Bring emergency contact information for parents and health care providers to each competition and practice in case a rider needs to be taken to an emergency department right away for a concussion or other serious injury.
- If first responders are called to care for an injured rider, provide them with details about how the injury happened and how the rider was acting after the injury.

Plan ahead. How can you encourage concussion reporting among your riders?

Athletes May Try to Hide Concussion Symptoms.

Athletes may be less likely to tell their coach or athletic trainer about a possible concussion during a championship game or other important event.²

Plan ahead. How can you help riders lower their chance of getting a concussion?





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Some athletes may not report a concussion because they don't think a concussion is serious.

They may also worry about:

- Losing their position on the team.
- Jeopardizing their future sports career.
- Looking weak.
- Letting their teammates or the team down.
- What their coach or teammates might think of them.^{3,4,5}

Plan ahead. What should you do if you think a rider has a concussion?

HOW CAN I SPOT A POSSIBLE CONCUSSION?

Riders who show or report one or more of the signs and symptoms listed below—or simply say they just “don’t feel right” after a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body—may have a concussion or other serious brain injury.

Signs Observed by Trainer/Coaches or Parents

- Appears dazed or stunned.
- Forgets an instruction, is confused about an assignment.
- Moves clumsily.
- Answers questions slowly.
- Loses consciousness (even briefly).
- Shows mood, behavior, or personality changes.
- Can't recall events prior to or after a hit or fall.

Symptoms Reported by Riders

- Headache or “pressure” in head.
- Nausea or vomiting.
- Balance problems or dizziness, or double or blurry vision.
- Bothered by light or noise.
- Feeling sluggish, hazy, foggy, or groggy.
- Confusion, or concentration or memory problems.
- Just not “feeling right,” or “feeling down”.

NOTE: Concussion signs and symptoms often show up soon after the injury, but it can be hard to tell how serious the concussion is at first. Some symptoms may not be noticed or may not show up for hours or days later.

WHAT ARE SOME MORE SERIOUS DANGER SIGNS TO LOOK OUT FOR?

In rare cases, a dangerous collection of blood (hematoma) may form on the brain after a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body and can squeeze the brain against the skull. Call 9-1-1 or ensure a rider is taken to the emergency department right away if, after a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body, he/she has one or more of these danger signs:

- One pupil larger than the other.
- Drowsiness or inability to wake up.
- A headache that gets worse and does not go away.
- Slurred speech, weakness, numbness, or decreased coordination.
- Repeated vomiting or nausea, convulsions or seizures (shaking or twitching).
- Unusual behavior, increased confusion, restlessness, or agitation.
- Loss of consciousness (passed out/knocked out). Even a brief loss of consciousness should be taken seriously.





WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I THINK A RIDER HAS A POSSIBLE CONCUSSION?

As a trainer/coach, if you think a rider may have a concussion, you should:

- **Prohibit the rider from continuing to ride.** When in doubt, sit them out!
- **Keep them from riding on the same day of the injury and until cleared by a health care provider. For return to competitions, ensure that the appropriate return to riding rules are followed.** Do not try to judge the severity of the injury yourself. Only a health care provider should assess a rider for a possible concussion. After you remove a rider with a possible concussion from practice or competition, the decision about return to practice or competition is a medical decision that should be made by a health care provider. As a trainer/coach, recording the following information can help a health care provider assess the rider after the injury:
 - Cause of the injury and force of the hit or blow to the head or body.
 - Any loss of consciousness (passed out/knocked out) and if so, for how long.
 - Any memory loss right after the injury.
 - Any seizures right after the injury.
 - Number of previous concussions (if any).
- **Inform the rider's parent(s) about the possible concussion.** Let them know about the possible concussion and give them the HEADS UP fact sheet for parents. This fact sheet can help parents watch the rider for concussion signs or symptoms that may show up or get worse once the rider is at home or returns to school.
- **Ask for written instructions from the rider's health care provider on return to riding.** These instructions should include information about when they can return to riding and what steps you should take to help them safely return to riding.

WHY SHOULD I STOP A RIDER WITH A POSSIBLE CONCUSSION FROM RIDING?

The brain needs time to heal after a concussion. A rider who continues to ride with concussion has a greater chance of getting another concussion. A repeat concussion that occurs while the brain is still healing from the first injury can be very serious and can affect a rider for a lifetime. It can even be fatal.

WHAT STEPS CAN I TAKE TO HELP A RIDER RETURN TO RIDING?

A rider's return to school and sports riding should be a gradual process that is approved and carefully managed and monitored by a health care provider. When available, be sure to also work closely with your team's certified athletic trainer.

Below are five gradual steps that you, along with a health care provider, should follow to help safely return a rider to riding. Remember, this is a gradual process. These steps should not be completed in one day, but instead over days, weeks, or months

BASELINE: Rider is back to their regular school activities, is no longer experiencing symptoms from the injury when doing normal activities, and has a green light from their health care provider to begin the return to riding process.

Concussions Affect Each Athlete Differently. While most athletes with a concussion feel better within a couple of weeks, some will have symptoms for months or longer. Talk with an athlete's parents if you notice their concussion symptoms come back after they return to riding.

Work with the rider's health care provider and follow the five gradual steps for return to riding. A rider's return to school and riding should be a gradual process that is carefully managed and monitored by a health care provider.





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Plan ahead. How can you help a rider safely return to riding after a concussion?

A rider should only move to the next step if they do not have any new symptoms at the current step.

STEP 1: Begin with light aerobic exercise only to increase a rider's heart rate. This means about 5 to 10 minutes on an exercise bike, walking, or light jogging. No weightlifting at this point.

STEP 2: Continue with activities to increase a rider's heart rate with body or head movement. This includes moderate jogging, brief running, moderate-intensity stationary biking, moderate-intensity weightlifting (less time and/or less weight than a typical routine).

STEP 3: Add heavy non-contact physical activity, such as sprinting/running, high-intensity stationary biking, regular weightlifting routine.

STEP 4: A rider may return to practice.

STEP 5: A rider may return to competition.

REMEMBER: It is important for you and the rider's parent(s) to watch for concussion symptoms daily as the rider begins the return to riding process. If a rider's concussion symptoms come back, or he or she gets new symptoms when becoming more active at any step, this is a sign that the rider is pushing him- or herself too hard. The rider should stop these activities, and the rider's health care provider should be contacted. After the okay from the rider's health care provider, the rider can begin at the previous step.

To learn more, go to www.cdc.gov/HEADSUP

You can also download the CDC HEADS UP app to have concussion information at your fingertips. Just scan the QR code pictured below with your smartphone.



¹ Rivara FP, Schiff MA, Chrisman SP, Chung SK, Ellenbogen RG, Herring SA. (2014). The effect of coach education on reporting of concussions among high school athletes after passage of a concussion law. *Amer J Sports Med*, May, 2014, 42(5):1197-1203.

² Bramley H, Patrick K, Lehman E, Silvis M. (2012). High school soccer players with concussion education are more likely to notify their coach of a suspected concussion. (2012). *Clin Pediatr (Phila)*, 2012 April, 51(4):332-336.

³ Kerr ZY, Register-Mihalik JK, Marshall SW, Evenson KR, Mihalik JP, Guskiewicz KM (2014). Disclosure and non-disclosure of concussion and concussion symptoms in athletes: Review and application of the socio-ecological framework. *Brain Inj*. 2014;28(8):1009-21.

⁴ Register-Mihalik JK, Guskiewicz KM, McLeod TC, Linnan LA, Mueller FO, Marshall SW. (2013a). Knowledge, attitude, and concussion-reporting behaviors among high school athletes: A preliminary study. *J Athl Train*, July 12, 2013.

⁵ Chrisman, S. P., Quitiquit, C., Rivara, F. P. (2013). Qualitative Study of Barriers to Concussive Symptom Reporting in High School Athletics. *J Adolesc Health*. March, 2013, 52(3): 330-335.

⁶ Collins CL, Fields SK, Comstock RD. (2008). When the rules of the game are broken: What proportion of high school sports-related injuries are related to illegal activity? *Inj Prev*, 14(1):34-38.

The information provided in this fact sheet or through linkages to other sites is not a substitute for medical or professional care. Questions about diagnosis and treatment for concussion should be directed to your physician or other healthcare provider

