

Safety Note #121

SAFE HORSEBACK RIDING PRACTICES



Photographs Courtesy of
Sierra Foothill REC

Information available from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission indicates more than 70,000 people were treated in hospitals for horseback riding injuries during 2005. Most injuries occurred when riders either fell or were thrown from horses. Broken bones, bruises, sprains, and concussions were the most common types of injuries. Many of these injuries could have been prevented by being aware of potential hazards and using safe horseback riding practices.

Horse Characteristics

Horses have a wide field vision that encompasses about 270 degrees from the front of the animal backwards to their rear haunches. Like humans, horses cannot see directly behind themselves unless they turn their heads. Hearing and the sense of smell are very good in horses. There is a natural flight zone horses maintain between themselves and other animals, including people. Flight zones range from several hundred feet or more for wild horses to several feet or less for tame horses. It is normal behavior for a horse to kick when it is startled or surprised.

Safe Horseback Riding Practices

- Always wear appropriate clothing and personal protective equipment, including long pants, long-sleeved shirt, boots or hard-toed shoes with heels, sunscreen, and a hat with a brim.
- Before mounting a horse, remove loose jewelry and pull back long hair with a band or wear long hair under your hat.
- Approach horses within their field of vision. Move at a deliberate pace and make the animal(s) aware of your approach as you enter their flight zone.
- Once you are near a horse make sure the horse knows where you are at all times by speaking to the horse and/or keeping a hand on the horse's body. Always treat your horse with respect.
- Beginning riders should be matched with experienced riding horses.
- After saddling and bridling your horse, mount your horse by putting one foot in a stirrup and pushing off with your other foot while, at the same time, pulling on the saddle horn and back of the saddle. Lower yourself onto the saddle and put your push-off foot in the other stirrup.
- Take up the slack in the reins and gently squeeze your legs to get the horse moving. Once the horse responds, relax your legs and allow yourself to move with the motion of the horse.
- Riders should become familiar with the one-rein stop for emergencies. This maneuver should be practiced until it occurs naturally.
- Do not wrap lead ropes, reins, or other lines attached to the horse around your hands or other parts of your body.
- When trail riding, be aware of and pay attention to trail hazards such as overhanging branches, fence lines, stream or water crossings, and steep terrain.
- Promptly report any injuries to or from horses to your supervisor.
- Always wash your hands with soap and water after touching a horse or any other animal.



Safety Note #120 provides further safety information about working with horses.