

University of Kentucky Health Care Launches "Saddle up Safely" Program

Submit your ideas on rider safety to be entered in a drawing for World Equestrian Games tickets.

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In response to a large number of serious injuries resulting from equestrian activities, University of Kentucky Health Care has launched "Saddle up Safely," a program designed to raise awareness of equestrian safety and injury prevention. The program was officially launched on Tuesday, October 13 at the Kentucky Horse Park.

In 2007, over 78,000 Americans were treated in emergency rooms for horse-related injuries. Head injuries, which have the most potential to be life-threatening of any type of injury, comprised 15% of those ER visits. Most riders will not be surprised to learn that wearing a properly-fitting, certified equestrian helmet greatly reduces your chance of serious injury. Studies have shown that riders suffering from a head injury are four times as likely to die if they are not wearing a helmet.

UK Health Care also suggests that the use of body protectors, such as those worn by eventers in the cross-country phase, can prevent some chest and abdominal injuries. In order for a body protector to function, it must be properly fitted according to manufacturers' guidelines. Body protectors will not prevent all serious back, chest and abdominal injuries but do reduce the risk of bruises and abrasions and some shoulder and chest injuries.

Nearly 50% of all equestrian injuries are arm or leg injuries. UK Healthcare recommends wearing proper equestrian footwear (boots that are at least ankle-height and have a 1-inch heel), using safety stirrups or toe stoppers to prevent your foot from getting caught in the stirrup in case of a fall, and wear gloves to protect your hands and provide a better grip on the reins.

Most importantly, riders need to be aware of what they and their horses are capable of doing. An article from The American Journal of Surgery showed that 27% of equestrian injuries occurred because the rider was asking the horse to do something outside of his abilities. Half of the patients interviewed for the article believed that their injuries were caused by rider error and were preventable.

For the full safety guidelines, visit www.ukhealthcare.uky.edu/saddleup.

Have you experienced an equestrian injury? Have an equestrian safety tip to share? Submit your responses here and you will be entered into a drawing for four tickets to the 2010 Alltech World Equestrian Games.

Read more on helmet safety >>