



## **ISES CODE OF CONDUCT**

### **Ensuring Welfare, Safety and Performance for Horse and Rider**

The following guidelines have been written to ensure optimal horse and rider welfare and safety at competitive equestrian events run under the ISES Code of Conduct. These Code of Conduct guidelines are in line with current knowledge and understanding of the principles of equitation science, as advocated by the International Society for Equitation Science (ISES). It should be noted that these guidelines complement current equine health and welfare policy and legislation.

Equitation science provides a means to promote an objective, evidence-based understanding of the welfare of horses during training and competition and uses a multidisciplinary approach to explain horse training. Equitation Science applies valid, quantitative scientific methods that can identify what training techniques are effective and those that are ineffective or may result in equine suffering. These guidelines highlight the most salient aspects relating to ethical and welfare concerns and how these should be addressed during competitive events by organizers, sponsors, riders, trainers, grooms and other interested parties.

During any competition run under the ISES Code of Conduct, the following four principles on equine welfare and ethics should be adhered to at all times.

1. Practice related to equine care, use and welfare must be made by balancing current scientific knowledge and professional judgment.
2. Horses must always be provided with their basic needs, and an environment appropriate to their care and use, with thoughtful consideration for their species typical biology and behavior.
3. Horses must always be cared for in ways that minimize fear, pain, stress and suffering.
4. Procedures relating to equine housing, management care and use will be continuously monitored, evaluated and when indicated, refined or replaced.

(adapted from AVMA Animal Welfare Principles, 2013)



## **1. TRAVEL**

Traveling, especially over considerable distances, has been shown to be stressful for horses, potentially causing dehydration, metabolic stress and electrolyte imbalances. The health and wellbeing of the horse must be paramount during the transportation to and from any equestrian event. <sup>e.g. 3, 5, 13</sup>

1. Ventilation, temperature control and clean air must be provided at all times; access to feed and water must be available throughout the journey or at regular intervals, at least every 2 to 4 hours. Water must not be withheld or be unavailable for periods longer than 6 hours.
2. Careful consideration when planning the journey allowing for adequate rest stops is vitally important as any potential weight loss during transport due to dehydration or other metabolic stressors is likely to be stabilized.
3. Fatigue has been shown to become the limiting factor in healthy horses that travel for longer than 28 hours. Careful examination immediately after arrival following long journeys is essential.
4. Grooms accompanying horses during air transport must be trained and certified to appropriately care for and deal with their charges prior to, during, and following air travel and ensure air safety.
5. During travel by plane, insect proof netting must be installed to prevent the introduction of insect-borne diseases during re-fuelling/loading stops.
6. The respiratory disease colloquially known as 'Shipping Fever' remains a problem for both air and long-haul land travel. Clinical signs include depression, reluctance to drink, increased rectal temperature and increased respiratory rate. Allowing horse to lower their heads and monitoring air humidity to avoid very dry air is thought to help prevent respiratory problems. Careful veterinary examination immediately after arrival is essential, and the taking of rectal temperatures twice a day for at least three days afterwards is strongly recommended.
7. Considering the physiological and mental stresses associated both with travel and competition, it is recommended that horses are allowed 24 hours to recover from competition prior to embarking on their journey back home.



## **2. CLIMATE CONTROL**

At any equestrian event consideration must be given to allow for appropriate acclimatization time for both horse and rider. Temperature, humidity and altitude can all have an effect on the wellbeing of the horse and human athlete. <sup>e.g. 5, 13</sup>

1. Appropriate provisions should ideally be made to allow competitors from other climate zones to arrive preferably 2 weeks, and at a minimum 5 days, prior to their specific event. During that period horses should preferably be exercised in the same thermal conditions as they will be required to compete in to ensure appropriate acclimatization.
2. Attention must be paid to rehydration and, if horses are sweating heavily, to electrolyte supplementation.
3. Horses' tolerance limits for heat and humidity must be taken into account. Where these limits are likely to be challenged, appropriate measures need to be taken to ensure that horses are able to maintain their normal body temperatures, such as such as fanning the horse or repeatedly showering/misting it with cool water and scraping excess water off.
4. Cancellation or postponement of competition should be considered if the mechanisms for heat loss in the horses are sufficiently compromised. High levels of humidity will reduce sweat evaporation, severely limiting horses' ability to cope with heat stress. If the sum of the ambient temperature (in degrees Fahrenheit) and relative humidity (in percent) exceeds 150, especially if humidity contributes to more than 50% of the total, horses may be compromised. If the sum exceeds 180, or the ambient temperature exceeds 40°C (104°Fahrenheit), competitions should be cancelled or postponed to a different time of day.

## **3. STABLING**

Access to the stable area should be restricted, and these restrictions must be clearly indicated. If visitors are able to access the stables and surrounding areas, details of risks (such as horses kicking or biting), and appropriate control measures may also be required.

<sup>e.g. 1, 4, 11, 12, 13</sup>



1. Stabling environments must be constructed in a safe and secure manner. For example, flooring must be non-slip, there should be sufficient windows/openings for the air to circulate, but without creating drafts. There must be no sharp edges or protrusions horses could injure themselves on, and door- and passageways must be wide enough for horses not to catch themselves. Stables must be of sufficient size to enable a horse to perform comfort behaviors (rolling, lying down, moving, avoiding injury, self-grooming). Recommended stable sizes are a minimum of 3.5 x 3.5 meters for horses and 3 x 3.5 meters for ponies.
2. Horses must be provided with bedding that is dust free, dry and of sufficient depth to encourage the horse to lie down and urinate and allow him/her to avoid injuries.
3. Stables must be positioned so that horses can see other horses and are not exposed to external environmental stressors such as extreme temperatures, continuous lights, loud noises, crowds or other hazards.

#### **4. HORSE MANAGEMENT**

Management systems must not isolate individual horses from their conspecifics, or confine them to small areas. Although in certain situations such as a competitive environment there may be no alternative to stabling, the following points may reduce the stress of being confined and must be followed. <sup>e.g.1, 4, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13</sup>

1. Horses must not be confined in stables for longer than absolutely necessary. More specifically, horses must be removed from the stables, and either exercised or hand-walked at least twice a day for a period of at least 15 minutes per session.
2. Every horse must have free access to a supply of fresh, clean drinking water in its stable.
3. Horses must be fed in accordance with their workload taking into account the competition and training schedule. Horses are 'trickle' feeders and should receive the concentrated ration of their feed divided over several periods a day.
4. In line with their nutritional and behavioral requirements, horses must have ad libitum access to forage, or at least be given forage at several points throughout the day. At a minimum, feed and forage should be spread throughout the day to ensure horses are not left without food for periods longer than 4 hours.



5. It is the riders' responsibility to ensure that handlers of their horses possess relevant skills and knowledge to ensure that they are familiar with signs of ill health, distress and therefore be able to cater for the welfare needs of the horse. In future, it may be preferable for handlers (grooms) to attain registration through a centrally organized educational system.
6. Horses must be handled quietly, with care, patience and consistency.
7. Any reprimand towards the horse must only be applied at the exact time of the misbehavior and never with a delay of any amount afterwards. It should always be proportionate to the situation. (See Point 5 in next section).

## **5. TRAINING REGIMES, WARM-UP, AND COMPETITION**

At any equestrian sporting event, the welfare of the horse must remain the primary consideration at all times. The competitive event should showcase excellence in training of the horse. All of the ethical and welfare principles applicable when training horses apply equally to when horse and rider are in the competitive arena. No horse should be ridden or trained in such a way that it is subject to periods of distress, whether mental or physical. e.g. 6, 7, 8

1. Correct training of horses follows the principles of learning theory in line with the information contained in [www.equitationsscience.com/learning-theory-in-equitation](http://www.equitationsscience.com/learning-theory-in-equitation)
2. It is critical in the training context that the horse's responses are correctly reinforced and that horses are not subjected to continuous or relentless pressure from the bit, legs or spurs. They must be ridden with lightness and in self-carriage. Horses learn best when given aids or 'signals'/'cues' that are clear and consistent, using minimal pressure and where pressure is released immediately after the horse's correct response.
3. At no time should riding or training techniques be employed that are known to be damaging to the horse's psychological and/or physical welfare.
4. Relaxation and calmness in the horse must be prioritized. Any training/riding methods must be aimed at minimizing and avoiding the horse performing behaviors indicative of conflict and/or stress.



5. The use of whip, spur or rein to reprimand the horse as a means to educate or discipline it must be avoided wherever possible. On the rare occasion it is needed it must be applied at the exact time of the misbehavior and never with a delay afterwards. It must always be proportionate to the situation.
6. Horses must be ridden, trained and competed free of excessive restriction and/or constant pressures such as overly tight nosebands in training and competition or unyielding side-reins while lunging. A standardized gauge should be used to ensure nosebands are not over tightened (see: <http://www.equitationsscience.com/restrictive-nosebands>)
7. Poorly timed or excessive use of the whip, spurs or other equipment thought to cause the horse pain, injury or distress, is expressly forbidden.
8. Ridden sessions are to be halted immediately if horses show signs of injury or distress.
9. Any indication of pain or injury in the horse (e.g. lameness, traces of blood) must lead to the immediate disqualification of that particular horse from the event. The acting veterinarian should attend to the horse immediately once a problem has been identified, preferably in an area next to the arena that has been specifically set aside for such a purpose. However, riders are ultimately responsible for the welfare of their horses and any indications of pain or injury should be acted upon accordingly well before the horse enters the competition arena (please also refer to sections 5.2 and 5.3).
10. All tack or other attire must be in good working order and be fitted correctly to avoid discomfort, pain or injury.
11. All riding/lunging arenas and handling/treatment areas should be clearly designated and have dust-free, yielding, non-slip footing.
12. General schooling arenas (other than competitive warm-up arenas) should be set apart from the general competitive environment to allow horses to be worked in a relatively calm and stress-free environment.
13. Horses should only be lunged in specifically designated areas and only when wearing appropriate equipment. When being lunged, horses must wear either a bridle or a lunging cavesson to ensure adequate control. Excessive lunging is to be avoided to prevent overuse injuries.





14. Access to a track or park to ride out in is advisable to offer horses variety from training and competition even in a competitive environment. Tracks must be clearly designated.
15. Competitive warm-up arenas should be situated as close as possible and preferably next to the actual competitive event, so as to limit the exposure to potentially stressful and/or fear-inducing environments and to enable horse and rider to enter the ring in an optimal frame of mind.
16. Competitive arenas should be designed to allow horse and rider sufficient space and opportunity to habituate to the environment, including the judges' boxes, tribunes and spectators. If possible, competitive arenas should be made available for training and habituation purposes prior to the competitive event.

## **6. HEALTH CARE**

The health and well-being of the equine athlete must remain paramount throughout any competitive event. Riders, handlers, organizers and officials must strive to minimize any harmful effect of performance and sport on the physical and mental health of horses. <sup>e.g. 1, 2, 9, 10, 11</sup>

1. A qualified equine veterinarian should be in attendance at all times during any equestrian event.
2. Horses must be monitored by the rider and the attending team at all times for signs of ill-health and, if in doubt, veterinary advice should be sought at the earliest opportunity.
3. Horses must not be trained, ridden or competed if there is any doubt regarding their physical and mental fitness, and should be immediately provided with appropriate treatment by the attending veterinarian.
4. Doping, e.g. the use of performance altering or restoring drugs, or the inappropriate use of normal medication, e.g. the inadvertent use of a product that is not permitted during competition (for example phenylbutazone or a skin ointment containing corticosteroids, local anesthetic or irritant) is not permitted at any time. Substances can only be administered if permission has been granted by the attending veterinarian and the organizing committee. (For further details and the Equine Prohibited Substances List see <http://www.feicleansport.org/>).



5. Any event must have appropriate management and control routines in place to ensure that optimum health of horses can be maintained. Compliance with biosecurity measures and vaccination checks will be used to help prevent the outbreak and spread of infectious diseases.
6. All horses must be vaccinated to conform with either national or current FEI legislation, depending on the character of the event.
7. In the unlikely event that a horse might suffer if appropriate action was not taken immediately and once every reasonable attempt has been made to contact the owner, rider or care-taker, the equestrian veterinarian is permitted to make the necessary veterinary decisions to provide necessary treatment or emergency euthanasia. In the event that euthanasia is deemed necessary, equine veterinarians are advised to follow British Equine Veterinary Association (BEVA) or similar emergency euthanasia guidelines.

## **7. RIDER AND HANDLER HEALTH & SAFETY**

The potential for injury in equestrian sports is considered higher than in many other high-risk activities. Appropriate and reasonable care should therefore be taken to reduce the risk of serious injury to riders, grooms, handlers, organizers, spectators or anyone else present at an equestrian event. <sup>e.g. 8, 14, 15</sup>

1. Anyone riding or handling horses must take reasonable care that their behavior or the behavior of their horse/s does not adversely affect the health and safety of other persons or other horses.
2. Anyone riding or handling horses must cooperate and comply with any reasonable request or instruction given relating to aspects of health and safety at the equestrian event by event organizers or officials.
3. When riding horses, riders, grooms or any other members of the rider's team must wear appropriate equipment, including footwear, and protective headgear. Research has shown that injuries to the head are significantly reduced when riders wear appropriate protective headgear. Riders are therefore strongly encouraged to take the necessary safety precautions even in competition.





4. Riders, grooms or any other personnel must not ride, train or handle horses while under the influence of alcohol or any other 'recreational' drugs. It remains the riders' responsibility to ensure that members of their team adhere to these rules.
5. Doping or the inappropriate use of normal medication is prohibited unless following prescription by a qualified physician. Competing human athletes must follow current World Anti Doping Agency (WADA) and FEI rules and regulations (For more details see WADA <http://www.wada-ama.org/> or [http://www.fei.org/legal\\_activities/anti-doping-basics](http://www.fei.org/legal_activities/anti-doping-basics))

## **8. PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF HUMANS**

Performing at a competitive event can be stressful for all involved. The pressures felt by participants and stakeholders might, at times, lead to behaviors being displayed that are unacceptable in any sporting environment. Behavior considered unacceptable in connection with training and riding horses is dealt with elsewhere in this code of conduct (see Training and Management). However, in order to protect the psychological (and physical) well-being of riders, grooms and trainers, the following behaviors are deemed unacceptable <sup>e.g. 14</sup>

1. Swearing or using abusive language towards others (i.e. grooms, trainers, parents, other riders, organizers, officials, etc.).
2. Any manifestation of physical or psychological violence towards others, including horses.
3. Behaviors otherwise considered threatening, abusive or offensive.

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## **11. SOURCES**

The following resources were used in the development of this code of conduct:

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11. National Equine Welfare Council (NEWC) (2009). Equine Industry Welfare Guidelines Compendium for Horses, Ponies and Donkeys (Third Edition). Available online: [www.newc.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Equine-Brochure-09.pdf](http://www.newc.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Equine-Brochure-09.pdf)
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15. World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) (2013). Available online: [www.wada-ama.org](http://www.wada-ama.org)