

#6 WORKING SAFELY WITH HORSES



Photographs Courtesy of Yolo County 4-H Program

U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission data indicate that in 2005 more than 400 youth aged 18 years and younger were treated in hospitals for injuries received while grooming, walking, bridling, or saddling horses. Most injuries occurred when handlers were either kicked or stepped on by horses.

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.

A horse's hearing and sense of smell are very good. 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.

Working Safely With Horses

- Always wear appropriate clothing, including long pants, shirt, and boots or hard-toed shoes. Remove loose jewelry and pull back long hair with a band or wear long hair under a cap.
- It is a good safety practice to wear your equestrian helmet when grooming or working with horses.
- Approach horses on their left side and within their field of vision.
- Put a halter on the horse you are going to work with. Adjust the halter for a comfortable fit.
- Never walk beneath the neck of a horse that has its halter or reins tied to a post or other object.
- 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. If you maintain a calm manner when working with a horse, then the animal will respond in a similar calm manner.
- Never stand directly in front of or behind a horse.
- Always stay on your feet when grooming a horse. Do not kneel when working with horses.
- Use the appropriate brushes when grooming a horse. Avoid being kicked by standing to the side when brushing or combing a horse's tail.
- When cleaning a horse's hoof, slide your hand down the horse's leg and gently squeeze the lower limb (or fetlock) to get the horse to pick up its foot. Carefully use a hoof pick to clean hooves.
- Gently place the saddle pad and saddle on the horse. Reach beneath the horse to bring the girth across and fasten it firmly to the left side of the saddle. Never crawl beneath a horse.
- Carefully draw the bridle over the horse's nose. Slip the bit into the horse's mouth and the crown piece over the ears. Snugly fasten the throat strap and nose band under the horse's chin.
- When walking a horse, position yourself at the horse's left shoulder and use your right elbow to guide the horse to the right.
- To change a horse's direction, turn the horse away from you (to the right) to avoid being stepped on.
- Promptly report any injuries to or from horses to your group leader, parent, or guardian.
- Always wash your hands with soap and water after touching a horse or any other animal.

Clover Safe #7 provides further safety information about horseback riding

