Incident Reviews #1 and #2
A horse stepped on a camp staffer's hand. The staffer experienced pain, swelling, and abrasions, as well as increased pain with movement of his fingers.

In another incident, a 10-year-old Boy Scout was leading his horse through the gate of an arena, when the horse stumbled, and stepped on the Scout's foot.

Key Points

- Be aware of the animal you are handling.
- Wear sturdy footwear appropriate for riding with the tack provided when you groom, tack, and ride your horse.
- Always lead the horse with a rope.
- When working around a horse, always stay on your feet.

Incident Reviews #3 and #4
Inexperienced riders with guides became lost in a heavily wooded area and fallen logs and rocks. Trail guides were attempting to turn around and go back, but the horse a parent was riding began to run and jump over logs. The parent was thrown from the horse and sustained multiple injuries.

A Boy Scout fell from a horse and began experiencing pain in his upper-right quadrant when he inhaled. He was transported to the ER in a private vehicle and diagnosed with four broken ribs.

Key Points

- Be sure to wear an ASTM/SEI-approved riding helmet—not a bike or ski helmet—and that you have it fitted correctly to prevent head injury.
- Make sure participants know how to handle a horse when making emergency stops and emergency dismounts.
- Stay on the horse, stay calm, and avoid pulling back hard on the reins.

Incident Reviews #5, #6, and #7
An employee was trying to slip a knot that was on the lead rope of a horse, when the horse was startled and tightened the rope around the employee's thumb, resulting in partial amputation of the thumb.

Another employee was run over by a horse. She sustained three broken ribs, a bruised spleen, and a bruised liver.

An employee dismounting a bucking horse, fell on his right shoulder and broke his clavicle.

Key Points

- Lead a bridled horse with the reins over its head and with them in a figure eight, not wrapping around your hand.
- Wear gloves while you are leading, grooming, and riding your horse.
- Approach your horse from the left and avoid standing behind it or ducking in front of it.
- Horses are skittish and can be startled by fast or sudden movement, plastic bags blowing in the wind, loud noises, stressed-out riders, and new things and situations.

Riding a horse may be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for a member of our Scouting family, or that initial experience may lead to earning a Horsemanship merit badge, participating in a cavalcade, or engaging in other equine adventures. There are real risks involved whether you’re riding, working with, or just being near horses. Please review these incidents to help prevent future injuries.

“The rate of serious injury, per hour, is estimated to be approximately the same for horseback riders as of that for motorcyclists.”
— Source: Riders4Helmets.com
Most injuries that occur while horseback riders are dismounted are more serious than injuries that occur while mounted.” — Source: Westfall Horsemanship

Discussion Questions

- What supervision should unit leaders provide when a program or activity might include exposure to animals?
- Does anyone in the group have appropriate certification?
- How could these injuries have been prevented? Even with proper planning, risks will remain. Which risks would remain and which ones would be eliminated?
- What other risks do you think riding a horse might present?
- What other horsemanship techniques should be taught before riding?
- What lessons have you learned in this incident review?
- What are your state’s tort liability laws with respect to horsemanship?

Resources

- Horsemanship merit badge pamphlet