

News Release: March 20, 2025
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

4-H Horse Project – The Importance of Safety Helmets and Boots

By Aemi Miller, Lucky Horseshoe 4-H Club Leader

Horsemanship, like many things in life, requires us to be aware of safety. When we implement safe practices, we are taking steps to ensure that our personal selves, those around us, and even the horses we are handling remain free from injury.

Just as there are rules for things such as working in the kitchen, or learning to drive a car, there are also certain rules that should be followed to ensure we remain safe while spending time with our horses.

Proper riding attire, which includes boots and helmets, are two ways of making sure that we are taking the necessary precautions to stay safe.

Appropriate footwear serves multiple purposes. A well-made, sturdy leather boot is best. The boot must have a heel height of approximately 1 to 1½ inches. This feature is of utmost importance to prevent the rider's foot from slipping through the stirrup. In the event of a fall, a foot stuck in a stirrup could cause the rider to be dragged alongside the horse, causing serious injury.

Keep in mind that the sole of the chosen boot should also be narrow enough so as not become wedged in the stirrup. A half inch clearance between the side of your boot and the edge of your stirrup will allow your foot to slide free if the need arises.

Proper footwear is not only important when you are in the saddle. Soft-soled athletic shoes, or any type of shoe with an open toe should never be worn while handling your horse from the ground. They do not provide enough protection in the event of being stepped on. Your sturdy boots will go a long way in preventing a missing toenail or a broken foot.

Now, moving on to headgear. Did you know that the greatest majority of equine accidents are a result of head injuries? Although 4-H rules require wearing an approved helmet any time you are riding or driving your horse, wearing a helmet while working around you animals is recommended as well.

An approved helmet must meet the American Society for Testing Materials (ASTM) standard, as well as be certified by the Safety Equipment Institute (SEI). Look inside your helmet for a stamp showing compliance. These standards are important as it assures that the chosen headgear has been tested for the types of accidents that are most common in a particular sport. It is a good idea to replace your helmet after an accident even if there is no damage evident. Even a small impact can compromise the ability to protect your head in future falls.

There are many different styles, colors, and fits of helmets to choose from. Finding just the right one for your particular discipline and personal style can be fun!

Be sure that your chosen helmet is properly fitted. Consider the side straps as well as under the chin and the adjustment at the back. These points are all important to protect your head properly in the event of a fall.

Have a safe and happy ride!

References:

4-H Horse Advancement Program.
The 4-H Horse Project publication



use your head

DO THE FIVE-POINT SAFETY CHECK when selecting your riding helmet.

1. FRONT

The helmet should sit firmly in place about an inch above the eyebrows.

More than 1" = too small.
Less than 1" = too big.

2. SIDE

The straps on the side should meet just below and in front of your earlobes.

3. BACK

A snug-fitting helmet is best. The harness on the back should prevent the helmet from moving forward. Avoid using your hair to create a proper fit.

4. THROAT

The strap under your chin should be snug but not tight. Tilt your chin up and down to ensure a proper fit.

5. TEST

Grasp the helmet with two hands and rock it back and forth. The skin and eyebrows should move with the helmet.



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Always choose to wear
a certified riding helmet.



No helmet can protect against every head injury. However, studies show a dramatic reduction in the severity of injuries when a properly fitted helmet is worn every time you ride a horse. Replace your helmet every five years or immediately after a direct impact from a fall.

If you or a child you know is interested in joining the Ferry County 4-H Horse Project or simply getting more information about 4-H, contact the Ferry County WSU Extension office at 775-5225 x1115 or at aaron.urseth@wsu.edu.

To learn more about the 4-H Program in Ferry County, contact the Extension office, (509) 775-5225, X1115, aaron.urseth@wsu.edu 350 E. Delaware Ave. #9, Republic, WA 99166. 4-H is a WSU Extension program, which is available to all without discrimination. Evidence of noncompliance may be reported through your local Extension office.