

## Concussion Advice

This advice should be read in conjunction with:

[UK-wide Concussion Guidelines for Grassroots Sport](#)

Please contact [safety@pcuk.org](mailto:safety@pcuk.org) for further support and advice.

Head injuries and concussion can be very serious and life changing. Serious head injuries are usually obvious, but concussion can be very subtle. It may not be immediately apparent but should be taken very seriously. Recovery from concussion should be managed carefully.

### What causes concussion?

Concussion can be caused by a direct blow to the head or an impact to other areas of the body that can cause a whiplash type injury to the brain.

#### The Effects of Concussion:

- **Physical:** Headaches, dizziness, and vision problems.
- **Mental Processing:** Slowed thinking, difficulty processing, and blank moments.
- **Mood:** Emotional instability, sadness, irritability, or temper issues.
- **Sleep:** Changes in sleep patterns, including sleeping more or less than usual.

#### Consequences of Concussion:

- **Increased Risk:** Previous concussions raise the likelihood of sustaining another concussion, and recovery may take longer.
- **Vulnerability in Children:** Children are particularly susceptible to concussions and take longer to recover. They also face a higher risk of severe neurological complications if they don't fully recover before resuming activities.

Ensuring proper recovery time is critical to reducing long-term effects and preventing further injury.

Continuing vigorous activity or an activity that increases the risk of concussion in the aftermath of a concussion can worsen symptoms, delay recovery, and may lead to serious injury or even death due to second impact syndrome, where another head injury occurs before full recovery.

***“When in doubt, sit them out.”***

### **Initial Response:**

Any person involved in an incident that could have caused an injury including a head injury or concussion must be assessed by the on-site first aid provider, whether that is a volunteer first aider, a medical practitioner or another health care professional.

Reasonable care should be taken to ensure the person involved in the incident has not sustained a serious head injury or concussion.

### **Diagnosis**

Although First Aiders cannot formally diagnose a concussion, they are empowered to prevent a person from continuing any activity if they suspect a concussion or head injury could have occurred.

A Suspicion of concussion will be treated as a confirmed concussion, and as such **any** first aiders officiating at a Pony Club activity can stop someone from continuing if they have any suspicions of a concussion, this includes:

- Trained First Aiders - completed an Emergency First Aid at Work course
- Qualified First Aiders – completed a First Aid at Work course
- Health care professionals e.g. nurse or paramedic
- Medical Professionals in attendance, a doctor.

Any suspicion of concussion needs to be referred to a hospital or a doctor off site for formal diagnosis and they must not ride again or take part in any Pony Club activity until they have been seen by a doctor/hospital.

**Note:** Even if a person does not lose consciousness (is not “knocked out,”) that person may sustain a concussion. Any loss of consciousness should be treated as a concussion.

### **Diagnosis by an on-site volunteer First Aider or Paramedic:**

If a first aider or paramedic suspects a head injury or concussion, the parents/guardians or next of kin should be advised to take them to hospital for a professional diagnosis, or an ambulance should be called if there are concerns about a serious injury.

### **Diagnosis by a Doctor:**

Whether on site or at hospital, a doctor can diagnose concussion or head injury. If suspected, it is usual that an on-site doctor will refer to hospital for continued monitoring or investigation.

**Confirmation of no concussion or head injury onsite:**

In the event of a minor accident an assessment may make it immediately obvious that there is no risk of head injury or concussion.

When a minor accident takes place and the person performing the examination is 100% satisfied that the person who underwent the assessment did not sustain a head injury or concussion, the rider can be considered well enough to resume the activity they were performing at the time of the accident.

If there are any concerns about fitness to continue, then the rider should stop the activity and further health advice should be sought.

**During Competitions:**

First Aid providers and other healthcare professionals will strive to assess competitors promptly. However, as head injuries can develop over time, officials or healthcare professionals may need to perform several assessments. During this process, a member may miss part or all of an event. In such cases, the relevant **Sport Rules** for missing phases or part of the competition will apply.

Please refer to the specific sports rulebooks for rules and guidelines on falls, and whether a rider is allowed to continue afterwards.

**Notification:**

If someone has sustained a suspected head injury or concussion at an activity or competition, the organisers should inform the DC/Proprietor.

If the head injury is severe, it should be treated as a serious accident, see 'Management of a Serious Incident' in The Pony Club Recourse hub for further advice.

**Care Advice, if concussion is suspected or confirmed:**

**Officials/Volunteers should:**

- Remove them immediately from the activity.
- Make sure they undergo assessment by an on-site first aider/medical professional.
- Observe them for signs and symptoms of head injury/concussion.
- Call an ambulance if there are concerns about a serious injury
- Speak to parents/guardians or next of kin, they know them best, are they concerned?
- Ensure an accident form is completed, collect all the information required.
- Return the injured person to the care of parents, guardians, or next of kin.

- Give parents/guardians/next of kin **The Pony Club Concussion Advice Form**.
- Notify the DC.

**Parent/Guardians/Next of Kin should:**

- Not leave them alone for the first 24/48 hours.
- Seek professional medical advice from NHS111, or a doctor at hospital.
- Monitor for worsening symptoms.
- Encourage rest for the first 24-48 hours.
- Stop or at least minimize smartphone, screen, and computer use for at least 48 hours, as reducing screen time has been shown to aid recovery.
- Notify Branch DC/Centre Proprietor, school, sports clubs.

**The Injured person should, with the help of Parents/next of kin:**

- Stop immediately if you bang your head or suffer a whiplash type accident.
- Be honest about how you feel.
- Don't delay seeking help.
- Do not return to any type of activity involving horses or strenuous activities if you still have symptoms.
- If symptoms persist, seek professional advice, from GP or NHS 111.
- If you think someone else has suffered a head injury, report it and encourage them to report it.

**Concussion Rule:**

If a person is diagnosed with concussion, they must not ride or take part in any Pony Club organised activity that involves close contact/handling or riding of horses or ponies for 21 days This may need to be extended if symptoms persist, on the advice of the treating doctor. All concussion must be reported to Head Office using the online accident report form or by email if it occurred outside of the pony club. Concussion advice should be followed without exception.

### **Graduated Return to Activity:**

If a concussion diagnosis is confirmed, the injured person will be advised not to ride or take part in any activity that potentially involves 'hard contact' for 21 days.

The UK Government Graduated Return to activity (Education/Work) and Sport Programme should be followed:

Stage 1: Relative Rest for 24-48 hours

Stage 2: Gradually introduce daily activities

Stage 3: Increase tolerance for mental and exercise activities

Stage 4: Return to study/work and sport training (not involving riding horses or ponies)

Stage 5: Return to normal work/education and full training (not involving riding horses or ponies)

Stage 6: Return to normal riding – not before 21 days as long as there are no symptoms for 14 days

If symptoms persist beyond 28 days, remain out of sport and seek medical advice from GP.

### **Returning before 21 days:**

If a volunteer first aider or someone NOT registered with the General Medical Council, has diagnosed a concussion and the Member or the Parents / Guardian do not agree with that diagnosis, they may request a review by a doctor with experience in assessing concussion. If the doctor is happy to certify that they are not suffering with a concussion, they may return to all Pony Club organised activities. Evidence regarding this decision is required in the form of a medical letter. If a diagnosis of concussions is given by the professional who is registered with the General Medical Council (i.e. is a registered medical practitioner), it cannot be subsequently challenged. Their decision is final – this is because concussion can have symptoms that are brief or may be seen at a specific time after the injury, and not again.

### **Concussion and Head Injuries sustained elsewhere:**

Ultimately, it is the parent/guardians' responsibility to make decisions about the health and welfare of their child. A culture of openness and honesty should be encouraged.

If a Pony Club Official becomes aware that a member has sustained a suspected

or confirmed head injury/concussion elsewhere, they should report their concerns to the DC. The Member must not be allowed to take part in any Pony Club activities that involve horses/ponies, whether mounted or unmounted for 21 days unless appropriate medical evidence of fitness to ride can be provided.

**Notifying other Equine Organisations:**

In the interest of safety and welfare, The Pony Club reserves the right to inform other equine organisations such as The Pony Racing Authority or British Eventing, about a concussion if there is concern that the Member may compete with them within 21 days of the accident.

**Refusal of treatment:**

If a professional opinion is advised, because of suspected concussion, and the parents/guardians or next of kin decide not to follow this advice or not allow the injured person to be examined, either at the activity or in hospital, the injured person must not be allowed to continue with the activity or ride. For the avoidance of doubt, at this point, it should be presumed that they have sustained a confirmed concussion until a medical professional has confirmed otherwise.

Depending on the circumstances, choosing not to allow further examination could raise safeguarding concerns.

**Ignoring Advice:**

Someone may be asked not to carry on by an Official, including a first aider, who believes they may have sustained a concussion either at the time of injury or from a previous injury (which may not have been sustained whilst riding) and because concussion is difficult to diagnose, practitioners of all grades must err on the side of caution. Any decision must be respected, ignoring an official's advice about concussion breaches The Pony Club's Codes of Conduct.

**Concussion Protocol:**

All concussion is a notifiable condition and must be reported using the online accident form. This will initiate the Concussion Protocol. All concussion is recorded on the persons' Pelham Contact Record.

Please see Resource Hub for the Head Injury and Concussion Flowchart, the reporting process and the Concussion Advice Form to be given out if concussion is suspected or confirmed.

