ADVENTURE ACTIVITY GUIDELINES

# Horse Riding

Schools must follow the Department’s Excursion Policy and Guidelines and the requirements outlined in this document when planning, conducting and approving adventure activities.

These guidelines are for developing risk management plans specific to the location, activity and group participating. They are not intended to be used as a training manual. Staff instructing the activity must have sufficient knowledge/expertise in the activity.

This guideline applies to horse riding activities other than any equestrian sporting events.

The recommended minimum age for participants for trail riding is normally 10 years. For students younger than this, horses should be on a lead rope at all times unless students have proven abilities and experience as riders.

If an overnight camping component is planned, please also refer to Camping guidelines. See Overnight horse management section below for managing horses overnight.

## activity Definitions

**Enclosed arena** – an enclosed area that has been specifically designed for horse riding and instruction.

**Trail riding** – an organised horse ride operating outside of an enclosed horse area or arena.

## Staffing definitions

**Staff** – any adult approved by the principal who provides supervisory, instructional or educational elements of the activity or excursion. See Excursions Guidelines: Staffing for further details.

**Teacher** – a staff member registered with the Victorian Institute of Teaching who provides a supervisory role on a program.

The following roles can be filled by school staff, a teacher or an external provider, or a volunteer (See [Volunteers in Schools](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/volunteers/policy) policy).

**Designated Instructor** – the appointed staff member on a program who provides the lead technical expertise and supervision for the activity.

**Instructor** – a staff member who provides professional, technical expertise and supervision for the activity.

**Assistant Instructor** – a staff member who provides assistance to the instructor(s) in the provision of technical expertise and supervision for the activity. An assistant instructor role may be filled by a volunteer (See: Volunteers in Schools Policy).

## Horse Safety Australia Accreditation

Horse Safety Australia has a site accreditation scheme for horse establishments throughout Australia.

Using an establishment with current Horse Safety Australia site accreditation for horse riding activities with school students is highly recommended.

Where establishments do not hold current accreditation, thorough checks by a person knowledgeable and experienced about horse riding should be made regarding:

* the suitability of the horses for the students and the condition and safety of the equipment
* the suitability of the terrain and any enclosures where the riding will take place
* the suitability of the proposed program given the assessed ability of the students.

The [Horse Safety Australia](http://www.horsesafetyaustralia.com.au/) and [Australian Horse Industry Council](http://www.horsecouncil.org.au/) provide useful materials to support schools in their planning and decision making. The Horse Safety Australia [Horse Safety Standards for Riding Programs](http://www.horsesafetyaustralia.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2008/10/HSA-STANDARDS-current-32019.pdf) is a useful resource for reference.

## Student preparAtion and skills

Planning for activities should begin with an assessment of each students’ current knowledge, skills and experience in horse riding and outdoor environments.

The assessment of students’ current knowledge, skills and experience in the activity should be documented using [[https://www.education.vic.gov.au/_layouts/images/icdoc.png](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/safety/participrep.doc)Documentation of Participant Preparation, Prerequisite Skills/Knowledge​ ​ (doc - 139kb)](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/safety/participrep.doc).

The instructor should ascertain the previous experience of each student.

Instructional staff must brief students on:

* equipment, clothing and footwear that is suitable for the activity and location
* safety measures appropriate to identify and control risks associated with horse riding and the environment
* minimal environmental impact techniques relevant to the activity location
* historical and cultural considerations relevant to the activity and location
* activity scope and boundaries
* communication and communication signals
* explanation of relevant terminology.

Beginner riders must be briefed on:

* how to approach a horse correctly
* information about how to behave around horses (for example, to be quiet and calm, make no sudden movements, to be alert, particularly when standing and holding a horse in order to avoid being stepped on or getting too close to another horse, not walking immediately behind a horse)
* care and respect for horses.

Instructors must:

* match horse to each rider’s level of prior experience
* check each student’s riding helmet and footwear
* match and adjust each horse’s equipment to its rider
* assist each student to mount the horse.

All beginners must be instructed in basic riding and horse control skills including:

* the ability to maintain a safe distance from the horse and rider in front
* the ability to stop, start and to turn the horse.

Students must demonstrate the ability to perform these tasks if going on a trail ride. The trail ride should be matched to the ability of the least skillful rider in the group.

## Equipment

All equipment used must be in sound condition, suitable for the activity and must meet applicable industry safety standards as listed below.

##### Helmets

All participants must wear well-fitting, firmly fastened horse riding helmets that conform to the current Australian Standard 3838 or recognised international standards.

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##### Footwear

Where possible, leather or synthetic boots with a smooth sole and solid heel should be worn.

Footwear or stirrup equipment should prevent a foot from sliding forward through the stirrup.

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##### Saddle

Saddles must be checked to ensure that:

* girths and surcingles do not have cracks, splits or worn stitching
* stirrup leathers have not split or worn thin, and do not have worn stitching
* stirrup irons are not too small or too large for the rider’s boots
* saddles and saddle cloths fit comfortably.

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##### Bridles and reins

Bridles and reins must be checked to ensure that:

* they have not worn thin, and do not have worn stitching
* bits are not worn at the joints.

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##### Instructor equipment

Each instructor must have a lead rope and must know how to use it to lead correctly from another horse.

## Clothing

Long pants that fit firmly are advisable to prevent rubbing and pressure marks and sleeved shirts are recommended. Shorts or skirts are inappropriate and loose jewellery is unsuitable.

## Experience and qualifications

Staff instructing the activity should have sufficient knowledge and experience of the activity and the activity environment to operate in all reasonably foreseeable conditions.

The designated horse riding instructor/s must have one of the following:

* a current Instructor or Trail Guide Certificate from [Horse Safety Australia](http://www.horsesafetyaustralia.com.au/)
* current equivalent documented training and experience from another training provider or education institution, which may include coaching qualifications from [Equestrian Australia](http://www.equestrian.org.au/) or [Australian Horse Riding Centres](http://www.horseriding.org.au/)
* equivalent documented experience in lieu of certification/accreditation.

The designated instructors must be familiar with the horses and the terrain in which the riding will take place.

Horse riding is a very popular activity for students with disabilities and impairments. Instructors in charge of groups consisting of students with disabilities should have experience and training in this area, and steps should be taken to ensure there are sufficient helpers (appropriately briefed) to manage the students who need extra assistance.

Where students with disabilities and impairments or medical conditions are to participate in horse riding activities, particular attention may need to be given to:

* student supervision and support —the student may require support on both sides as well as an instructor leading the horse
* the use of a mounting ramp for the safety of the rider and the helpers
* the training of staff and/or helpers on how to lift and transfer the student’s weight across to the horse. ([Riding for the Disabled Association](http://www.rda.org.au/) of Australia’s Volunteer Information Booklet contains such advice.)
* frequent checks during a trail ride for fatigue and loss of concentration (regular rests may need to be taken so that students can alter their weight and use different muscles)
* students with the condition known as ‘atlantoaxial instability’ (greater than average neck mobility) is common in those with Down Syndrome. Students with this condition should not be permitted to undertake riding activities
* students with epilepsy, may need a helper walking beside them (refer Riding for the Disabled Association of Australia’s Volunteer Information Booklet).

 [Documentation of staff qualifications and experience (doc - 151kb)](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/safety/staffqual.doc) must be used to document staff experience and training in lieu of the listed qualifications.

Where an external contractor is chosen to run all or part of this activity, see: Excursions Guidelines – External Providers.

## Supervision

Supervision is a critical factor in managing risk in the outdoors.

A minimum of two staff members must be present for each activity, one who has main responsibility for activity instruction and the other to assist the instructor.

It may be necessary to increase the staff allocation based on ability to observe or monitor students on activity with consideration to:

* students (medical conditions, age, physical, mental and emotional maturity, ability and experience)
* group (dynamics and size)
* staff (medical conditions, age, ability and experience, qualifications and skills)
* location (remoteness, communications and environmental conditions).

Reasons for increasing staff allocations must be documented.

The following table shows the minimum staff-to-student allocation that must be used for horse riding activities.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Riding in an enclosed area** | |
| Staff numbers | Student numbers |
| 2 | 1–16 |
| 3 | 17– 24 |
| Trail rides\* | |
| Staff numbers | Participant\*\* numbers |
| 2\* | 1–12 |
| 3\* | 13–18 |

\*For trail rides there must be a minimum of two instructors.

\*\*For trail rides where school staff do not have sufficient experience, they must be included in participant numbers.

The teacher in charge is responsible for the supervision strategy, which must be endorsed by the school principal as part of the excursion approval process. Staff members must supervise students according to that strategy, and in accordance with their duty of care. It is the role of the teacher in charge to clearly and adequately explain the supervision strategy to all participating staff members.

Students not directly participating in the activity must be separately supervised in line with Excursions Guidelines – Supervision.

## Overnight Horse Management

To ensure the appropriate health and welfare of the horses, overnight instructional staff must ensure:

* horse are provided sufficient feed and water
* horses are suitably contained and managed
* manure is managed appropriately
* any student interaction with horses is supervised.

See Agriculture Victoria for [Code of Practice for the welfare of horses at horse hire establishments](file:////Users/davidhagel/Library/Containers/com.microsoft.Word/Data/Downloads/SGEO%20PROOFED%20copies/●http:/agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/animal-health-and-welfare/animal-welfare/animal-welfare-legislation/victorian-codes-of-practice-for-animal-welfare/code-of-practice-for-the-welfare-of-horses-at-horse-hire-establishments) for further information on horse welfare and overnight horse management.

## Peak bodies and expert advice

Australian Horse Industry Council <http://www.horsecouncil.org.au/>

Horse Safety Australia <http://www.horsesafetyaustralia.com.au/>

Outdoors Victoria <https://outdoorsvictoria.org.au/>

Riding for the Disabled <http://www.rda.org.au/>

The Horse Safety Australia [Horse Safety Standards for Riding Programs](http://www.horsesafetyaustralia.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2008/10/HSA-STANDARDS-current-32019.pdf)

The Department of Education and Training policy for [Teaching with animals](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/practice/Pages/animals.aspx)

Australian Horse Industry Council Code, [HorseSafe (2009)](http://www.horsecouncil.org.au/horse-safe/)

Safe Work NSW Code of Practice: [Managing risks when new or inexperienced riders or handlers interact with horses in the workplace (2017)](https://www.safework.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/79160/SW08262-Code-of-Practice-Managing-risks-when-new-or-inexperienced-riders-or-handlers-interact-with-horses-in-the-workplace.pdf)

Adventure Activity Standards: [Trail riding (pre-release 2019)](http://australianaas.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Horse-Trail-Riding-GPG-pre-release-v1.0.pdf)

Agriculture Victoria - [Code of Practice for the welfare of horses at horse hire establishments](http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/animal-health-and-welfare/animal-welfare/animal-welfare-legislation/victorian-codes-of-practice-for-animal-welfare/code-of-practice-for-the-welfare-of-horses-at-horse-hire-establishments)

Agriculture Victoria – [Code of Practice for the welfare of horses](http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/animal-health-and-welfare/animal-welfare/animal-welfare-legislation/victorian-codes-of-practice-for-animal-welfare/code-of-practice-for-the-welfare-of-horses)

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