

Head Injury and Concussion 2017

Rule 7G of the Health, Safety & Safeguarding Rulebook 2017



(i) General Advice

Head injuries and concussion are life threatening and potentially life changing incidents. Serious head injuries are usually obvious, but concussion can be very subtle and not always immediately apparent.

Head injuries result from a mechanical insult to the head, and can cause traumatic brain injury, possibly leading to permanent disability or death.

Concussion is a disturbance in brain function caused by a direct or indirect blow to the head. Some people describe concussion as mild traumatic brain injury. Concussion should be seen as part of a spectrum of brain injury with traumatic brain injury at one extreme and no injury at the other. Typically concussion cannot be seen on standard brain scans, which makes it difficult to diagnose objectively. Repeated injury to the head can worsen an already pre-existing concussion, even if the time between injuries is counted in days or weeks.

The Pony Club wants to ensure Members / riders attending Pony Club activities enjoy themselves and get the most out of riding. At the same time, they must also balance that enjoyment with Members' / riders' safety. This may mean on occasion that Members / riders are asked not to ride by officials who believe 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). Parents / guardians, Members, officials and other riders must respect this decision. It is a decision sometimes made without having objective evidence, but it is made in good faith and in the pursuance of avoiding further harm.

(ii) Incidents that could cause head injuries or concussion

Any Member / rider who, at a Pony Club activity, suffers an incident that could cause head injury or concussion (for example, a fall from their horse / pony) should be assessed. Who does this assessment will depend on the first aid cover that is in place for that activity. Depending on the level of first aid cover then the exact process of diagnosing whether the Member has suffered no head injury / concussion, a suspected head injury / concussion or a confirmed head injury / concussion will be slightly different. The process for diagnosing each option is talked through in more detail below.

From the assessment being carried out it may be immediately obvious that there is no cause for concern. In the course of Pony Club activities, the Pony Club is well aware that there are different kinds of falls and that assuming every fall leads to a head injury would be counterproductive to the aims of the organisation. We ask that reasonable care is taken to ensure Members / riders have not sustained a serious head injury or concussion.

(iii) Unconsciousness

If a Member / rider is unconscious following an incident they should be treated as if they are suffering with a confirmed concussion and the steps in points vii) below should be followed.

(iv) Who can diagnose head injury or concussion?

Diagnosis of a head injury or concussion (both confirmed and suspected) can be carried out by any level of first aid cover officiating at a Pony Club activity. These could be a trained or qualified first aider (including a coach), a paramedic or a doctor. If there is any doubt as to the diagnosis the Member / rider should see the highest level of first aid cover that is present and they should make the diagnosis. If the first aid cover at the activity cannot reach a definite diagnosis then they should refer the Member / rider to a hospital or a doctor off site for them to make a diagnosis.

It would be more usual for a trained or qualified first aider to say they suspect a head injury or concussion than to diagnose it themselves. If they are the highest level of first aid cover available at the activity that will mean the Member / rider has to go off site to have the diagnosis made by a doctor.

The Member / rider should not ride again until they have been seen by a doctor. This may mean that the rider will miss any part of an activity or competition.

(v) Actions to be taken in the event of a suspected head injury or suspected concussion diagnosis

If a diagnosis of a suspected concussion or head injury is made by a first aider, they should advise the parents / guardians to take the Member / rider to hospital.

Any Member / rider who has been diagnosed with a suspected or confirmed head injury or concussion should not be left alone and must be returned to the care of their parents / guardians where appropriate.

Once a diagnosis of suspected head injury or concussion is made by the highest level of official first aid cover present at the activity, then that decision is final. No one may overrule that decision on the day if it is made in good faith. If a Member / rider is advised to see a doctor because of suspected head injury or concussion and the parents / guardians decide not to allow the Member to be examined (either at the activity or in hospital), the Member will not be allowed to ride again on the day and will be treated as if they have sustained a confirmed head injury / concussion. Depending on the circumstances, the decision not to allow further examination may be considered a safeguarding issue.

Where a Member / rider is diagnosed with a suspected concussion by a first aider or paramedic and that Member / rider subsequently sees a doctor who is sure that they do not have a concussion and did not suffer a concussion and will provide evidence that they are satisfied that the Member / rider is well, that Member / rider will be treated as if they did not sustain a concussion.

(vi) Actions to be taken in the event of a confirmed head injury or confirmed concussion

In the event of a diagnosis of a confirmed head injury or confirmed concussion, the doctor will advise the Member not to ride or take part in any activity that potentially involves hard contact for three weeks. They will advise the Member that they could, after 10 days, ask a doctor, who is experienced in assessing concussion (including in children where appropriate), whether they have any concerns about any ongoing concussion problems. If that doctor is happy to certify that the Member is not suffering with a concussion, the Member may ride again, providing evidence regarding that decision is provided. If no evidence that such an assessment has been made, the

Member should not take part in any Pony Club riding activity and/or any unmounted activity that may involve any hard contact for at least three weeks after the initial injury.

(vii) Actions to be taken in the event of a diagnosis of a confirmed or suspected head injuries / concussions outside of Pony Club activities

The Pony Club has no official way of automatically knowing about Members who sustain a confirmed or suspected head injury / concussion outside of Pony Club activities. A concussion may be sustained outside Pony Club activities, for example at riding activities organised by other BEF Member bodies or at school football / rugby / hockey matches. It is for parents / guardians ultimately to make a decision about the welfare of their child.

However, if a Pony Club official in charge of any Pony Club activity becomes aware that a Member has sustained a suspected or confirmed head injury / concussion and has been advised not to take part in any potentially hard contact activities for three weeks, they should not allow the Member to take part in any mounted activities and/or any unmounted activities that could potentially involve hard contact for three weeks, unless the Member or their parents / guardians can produce appropriate medical evidence of fitness to ride dated at least 10 days after the initial injury,

See Appendix I for Head Injury and Concussion Flowchart.