

Guidance on the assessment of accident or injury involving horses during race preliminaries

This document provides information about the decision-making processes followed by veterinary surgeons – BHA veterinary officers (VO) and racecourse veterinary surgeons (RVS) – stewards and starters at a race meeting when assessing accident and injury to racehorses before the start of the race.

The guidance builds on the provision of veterinary requirements set out in section 12.2 of the [BHA General Instructions](#) – Veterinary Services on Racecourses.

It is not intended to be exhaustive but instead outlines the some of the key criteria against which the accident or injury must be assessed. Decisions will be made with the purpose of:

- Safeguarding the wellbeing of horses and jockeys
- Protecting the interests of the owner and trainer
- Upholding the integrity and reputation of horseracing.

If a VO, RVS, steward or starter has any concern about the safety of the horse or jockey to compete in a race then the horse will be withdrawn.

Examination of horses before the start

If a horse is involved in an incident during race preliminaries and there is a possibility that they might be injured, they must be examined by a veterinary surgeon prior to either being permitted to race or recommended for withdrawal to the raceday stewards.

If the incident occurs in the pre-parade or parade ring, the horse will be moved to a discrete location for assessment. The stewards must be informed if they have not witnessed the event. Details of the incident should be obtained from any eyewitnesses to inform the assessment.

If the veterinary surgeon is satisfied that the horse should be permitted to race, the trainer or responsible person should be consulted to confirm agreement. The horse should also be examined again by a veterinary surgeon at the start to confirm that there is no obvious injury.

If the horse is deemed unsuitable to race, the stewards must be informed and they will withdraw the horse on veterinary advice.

Veterinary surgeons will take as much time as they need to ensure they can make as full an assessment as possible in deciding whether the horse should be permitted to race. Examinations during race preliminaries are challenging due to the location and the time-pressure to start races on time. This time-pressure will not compromise the assessment of the horse, which must be sufficient to satisfy the veterinary surgeon that they can make an informed decision.

Once horses have arrived at the start, the starter has responsibility for withdrawing any horse if necessary. The veterinary surgeons must inform the starter prior to examining a horse. The results of the examination and the advice given regarding the management of the horse must also be communicated directly to the starter.

Any treatment administered by the RVS must be recorded on a [VO19 form](#) with copies distributed to the trainer and VO.

Examples of incidents involving horses prior to the start

1. Falls and / or slips

A horse that falls or slips must be examined. If there are no signs of injury or lameness, the horse may be permitted to race proving the following is accurate:

The fall:

- a) was 'gentle' and witnessed by a veterinary surgeon and / or steward
- b) occurred on a soft surface, e.g., grass, rubber
- c) did not result in contact between the ground and the head, neck or spine of the horse
- d) did not result in contact between the ground and the shoulder and/ or hip

If it is deemed that the horse may be permitted to race, the jockey must be consulted and agree to ride the horse.

2. Loose horses and those that bolt

A loose horse or a horse that has bolted will be withdrawn if the incident is likely to have compromised its welfare or affected the horse's chances of racing to its full potential. This will be assessed by the veterinary surgeon and will consider:

- distance travelled whilst galloping / bolting
- speed of gallop
- heart rate
- respiratory rate
- physical findings at time of examination
- distance of the race
- age and race experience of the horse
- length of time for recovery before the start of the race
- ambient temperature
- condition of the going
- whether the jockey is still happy to ride the horse.

The stewards may withdraw horse without veterinary examination in circumstances where it is clear that the horse's welfare would be adversely affected through race participation and / or the horse has compromised its ability to perform to full potential.

3. Horses that are reported to have a gait of concern or to be moving poorly at the start by the jockey

If the jockey has concerns about the horse's movement or is worried that they feel lame when they arrive at the start, the horse must be examined by a veterinary surgeon in consultation with the starter and the jockey to decide on whether the horse is suitable to race.

4. Lost Shoes

Horses that are re-shod at the start must be examined at trot to verify there is no lameness before the jockey remounts.

Where a horse has spread a plate and the shoe has been removed, the veterinary surgeon will determine whether a further assessment is required before the horse races, according to the specific circumstances.

5. Kicks

Horses that are reported, seen or heard to be kicked before racing must be withdrawn unless there is strong evidence that the kick was clinically insignificant, i.e., the impact was on an area unlikely to have sustained damage that may predispose to fracture.

If a horse is kicked by another horse while in the stalls, it must be withdrawn unless the attending veterinary surgeon can be satisfied that there is no significant injury.

At the discretion of the starter, a horse that may have been injured by another horse's misbehaviour in the stalls may be unloaded to be examined by the RVS. If the horse is not visibly injured or lame they may be re-loaded into the stalls and race.

6. Blood at one or both nostrils at the start

The horse must automatically be withdrawn unless a wound is visible.

7. Horses that go through or under the front of the stalls

With the exception of the unusual occurrence of stall mechanism failure, horses that break out of the stalls must be withdrawn.

8. Head Injury in stalls

If a horse strikes its head on the stalls, it must be withdrawn.

9. Rearing in the stalls

Many horses rear in the stalls without suffering harm. If a horse rears and falls backwards or loses its footing and scrabbles to maintain its balance for more than the briefest of moments, then it must be withdrawn.

10. Falling in stalls

If a horse falls in the stalls, it must be withdrawn.

11. Horses that get their limbs over or hung up in the stalls

If a horse gets a forelimb over the front gate or side of the stall it must be withdrawn. Horses that kick out and hang one or both legs over the rear gates must also be withdrawn.

Horses that get their hind limb caught up on the running board can be repositioned by opening the back gates and reversing the horse to allow it to step down. If the horse struggles, is caught with the limb in hyperflexion for more than the briefest of moments or requires the use of ropes to reposition the limb it must be withdrawn due to the likelihood of injury.

Management of horses withdrawn for veterinary reasons at the start

Any horse withdrawn at the start for a veterinary reason must be examined by a veterinary surgeon, who will direct the most appropriate way for the horse to return to racecourse stables or the veterinary treatment box.

Possible options include travel by horse ambulance, led in-hand or ridden at walk. It is never appropriate for a horse withdrawn from racing for a veterinary reason to be cantered back. The method of travel must be primarily based on horse welfare but with consideration to racecourse logistics.

The RVS must report to the starter the specific instructions given about how a horse should be returned from the start following withdrawal for a veterinary reason. These instructions must be relayed to, clearly understood and followed by the jockey, in line with the [Rules of Racing](#), to help ensure the safety and welfare of the horse.