



MID-ATLANTIC STRATEGIC PLAN

TO REDUCE EQUINE FATALITIES



Horsemen's Guide to Risk Factors & Protective Measures

Assessing Risk

Horses at increased risk for catastrophic injury need to be managed differently than those with average or decreased risk. Thanks to the tremendous amount of data collected by the Equine Injury Database, and to the outstanding work done by Dr. Tim Parkin on behalf of the Grayson-Jockey Club Research Foundation, horsemen have the tools needed to assess risk.

- Every horse in a trainer's care should be evaluated based on the Risk Factors outlined in this brochure.
- Any horse that ticks any of the Risk Factor boxes should be under increased scrutiny.
- Horses at increased risk should be thoroughly examined by the attending veterinarian before every workout and race.
- Any sign of injury, particularly to the fetlock joint, should trigger comprehensive diagnostic testing.
- Avoid training horses at increased risk on medication that might mask soreness or injury.

Risk Factors Explained

Reducing catastrophic equine injury is a top priority for the horseracing industry. In order to achieve this goal, it is important to identify those horses at increased risk. In the fall of 2006, the inaugural Welfare and Safety of the Racehorse Summit made a landmark first step, announcing the development of a system to collect key information related to racing injuries, and the Equine Injury Database (EID) was born. More than 90% of racetracks, representing more than 99% of the racedays in North America, now participate in the EID. The information gathered, in combination with racing data from Equibase, give epidemiologists the material needed to do their job, investigating patterns and causes of disease and injury.

The Jockey Club retained Dr. Tim Parkin, a renowned epidemiologist from the University of Glasgow, to analyze the data. To date, Dr. Parkin has identified more than 20 factors associated with increased risk for fatal musculoskeletal injury in the Thoroughbred racehorse, including those specific to the Mid Atlantic region. These factors can be used as a guide to assess each horse, and to create care and training regimens tailored to the individual horse that will best protect it from injury.

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Risk Factor Check List

If an individual horse checks any of these boxes, there is an increased risk of fatal injury.

- Unraced at 2
- Unraced at 2 and 3
- Colt or stallion
- Competes on dirt
- Competes in claiming races
- Has ever been on the Vet's List
- Has had a career lay-up of 60 days or more due to injury or illness
- Has a sudden change in race frequency

Protective Factors

Consider these factors when assessing the risk of each horse:

- 1) Horses that have been in the barn for an extended period have a decreased risk of injury. Each month a horse stays with the same trainer decreases the risk of injury by 2%.
- 2) Sprinters are more at risk than distance horses. For every additional furlong in a race, the risk of injury decreases by 10%.
- 3) Giving a horse time off just to rest provides a measure of protection. The risk of injury decreases by 33% for a discretionary layup within 90-120 days of a race.

Mid-Atlantic Risk Factors

- **Age at First Start.** Compared with horses that make their first start at 2 years of age, those that make their first start as a 3-year-old are 28% more likely to sustain a fatal injury during their racing careers, and 4-year-olds are 41% more likely to sustain a fatal injury during their racing careers.
- **Career lay-ups of more than 60 days.** Risk of sustaining a fatal injury increases by 9% for each career lay-up of more than 60 days. **This is significant only when lay-ups are related to injury, rather than elective "rest" periods such as those characteristic of turf horses that are not raced during winter months.**
- **Making a start in a claiming race.** Horses racing in any form of claiming race are 33% more likely to sustain a fatal injury.
- **Male horses.** Geldings and intact male horses are 24% more likely to sustain a fatal injury compared with female horses.
- **Race frequency.** Sudden changes in racing intensity in the previous 6 months are associated with increased risk for fatal injury.
- **Racing Surface.** Horses racing on dirt are 109% more likely to sustain a fatal injury than horses racing on synthetic surfaces. Horses racing on turf are 64% more likely to sustain a fatal injury than horses racing on synthetic surfaces.
- **Vet's List.** Horses are more than 50% more likely to sustain a fatal injury immediately following release from the Vet's List. **It is very important to note that the increased risk for horses that have ever been on the Vet's List never returns to normal.** In the Mid-Atlantic region, the risk is maintained at 50% increased risk for all future starts.

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