



EQUESTRIAN SPORTS  
NEW ZEALAND

# BLUE CARDS FOR CONCUSSION

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THE ROLE OF THE ESNZ OFFICIAL  
UPDATED FOR 2024

[NZEQUESTRIAN.ORG.NZ](http://NZEQUESTRIAN.ORG.NZ)



# RECOGNISING AND MANAGING CONCUSSION

## CONCUSSION (AND RIDER WELFARE IN GENERAL) IS EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY.

Riders, parents, coaches and officials need to act in the best interest of rider safety and welfare by taking responsibility for the recognition, removal and referral of riders to a medical doctor. They should then ensure that concussion is managed as per the ESNZ guidelines.

Equestrian Sports NZ wants to ensure that anyone involved in horse riding knows what to look out for and what to do when they suspect a rider has sustained a concussion.

Axis Sports Medicine, with help from ACC, has developed a Concussion Policy for ESNZ, it can be download from our website here:

<https://www.nzequestrian.org.nz/safety/concussion/> (under Concussion Resources)

### THE PURPOSE OF THE DOCUMENT IS TO PROVIDE:

1. An increased awareness of concussion in equestrian sports – riders, officials, supporters and their families
2. Guidance on the identification and management of concussion for those involved in equestrian sports in New Zealand.

ESNZ officials have an important role in observing possible concussion and its effects (e.g behaviour/symptoms) and should take responsibility for removing the injured rider from the event.

Should an incident occur that has the potential to cause concussion during a competition, the primary concern shall be for the welfare of the rider. In cases of uncertainty always adopt a conservative approach – 'if in doubt, sit them out'.

Consult with medic/first aid person on the grounds if there is any doubt.

The decision to remove a rider from the competition/arena shall ultimately rest with the officials, and the rider concerned shall not be permitted to return to the competition until concussion has been excluded by a medical doctor and clearance to return has been confirmed by a medical doctor.



# WHY IS THERE A NEED FOR A CONCUSSION POLICY?

**CONCUSSION IS A SERIOUS INJURY AND OCCURS FREQUENTLY. AN ESTIMATED 35,000 HEAD INJURIES OCCUR IN NEW ZEALAND EVERY YEAR.**

Horse riders are at an increased risk of sustaining head injuries and concussion due to the nature of their sport. By wearing helmets, riders significantly decrease the possibility of head and skull injury but they do not prevent concussion completely.

Those who have a history of prior concussion are at an increased risk of repeat injury due to slowed reaction times and loss of balance that may have been caused by the initial injury. 11% of sports related ACC claimants have multiple concussions within a two year period. Evidence shows that with repeat concussion people may experience a decline in general health and quality of life up to 10 years following injury so it is imperative for repeat injuries to be prevented wherever possible.

## WHAT IS A CONCUSSION?

- Concussion is a brain injury that can occur in any sport. Concussion is caused by the impact of force (a blow) to a part of the body not necessarily the head directly.
- You don't have to be knocked out to be concussed.

Early recognition and appropriate treatment of concussion may improve outcomes.



# ESNZ GENERAL REGULATION ARTICLE 150

UPDATED FOR AUGUST 2024

8. *If a concussion is suspected, by a member of the Ground Jury, or event medical personal, at the event, the rider should be immediately removed from participating. The rider should then be referred for immediate medical review or have an assessment from a medical professional post-event - for confirmation or exclusion of a concussion and consideration of other diagnoses. No rider should return to riding or competition on the day of a suspected or confirmed concussive injury. Full return to riding competition should be no earlier than Day 21 post-injury and only if the rider has been medically cleared to return to riding and competition during that final week.*
- 8.1. *All riders who have been withdrawn from competition due to a suspected concussion are required to provide ESNZ with a medical clearance note from a registered GP or registered medical specialist before they are able to compete again. Once this has been received the Blue Card will be withdrawn.*
- 8.2. *If a rider who has been issued with a Blue Card competes without first providing medical clearance, this may result in disciplinary action taken through the ESNZ disciplinary process set out in the ESNZ General Regulations.*

## WHAT YOU SHOULD DO?

**RIDERS WHO ARE CONCUSSED ARE OFTEN UNAWARE OF THEIR SYMPTOMS AND MAY WANT TO KEEP RIDING.**

To help you identify and manage concussion follow the five Rs –

**RECOGNISE, REMOVE, REFER, RECOVER, AND RETURN.**

If a rider is unconscious, you need to

1. Check their ABCs are clear (Airway, Breathing, Circulation)
2. Ensure they are not moved until a medical professional arrives.



# 1. RECOGNISE

When a concussion, or possible concussion, occurs it is important to take action and to get help. The most important steps in the early identification of concussion are to recognise a possible injury and remove the participant from the sport/activity.

Concussion symptoms may occur straight away, or up to 48 hours after the event.

## CONCUSSION RED FLAGS

**A RIDER WITH ANY OF THE FOLLOWING SHOULD BE REFERRED TO HOSPITAL URGENTLY**

- Loss of consciousness or seizures
- Persistent confusion
- Double vision
- Deterioration after being injured – increased drowsiness, headache or vomiting
- Report of neck pain or spinal cord symptoms – numbness, tingling, muscle weakness.
- If the injured person is under the age of 20.
- Personal medical history of bleeding disorder/clotting disorder
- Personal history of regular medication use that could result in prolonged bleeding (e.g. Warfarin, Aspirin)
- Anyone who has inadequate supervision post-injury
- Visible skull deformity

If at any time there is any doubt the rider should be referred to hospital for an immediate assessment.

*If you suspect a concussion look out for the signs and symptoms below.*



## WHAT YOU MIGHT SEE

- Loss of consciousness
- Lying on the ground not moving or slow to get up
- Disorientation/confusion
- Loss of balance/coordination
- Visible injury to face or head (especially in combination with any other physical signs)
- Grabbing/clutching of head
- Dazed, blank or vacant look.

## WHAT THEY MIGHT SAY

Failure to answer any of these questions may suggest a concussion.

- Where are you riding today?
- What time is it now?
- How did you go in your last event?
- What day/month is it?
- What just happened?

## WHAT THEY MIGHT EXPERIENCE OR FEEL

- Blurry vision
- Dizziness
- Difficulty with bright light and/or loud noises
- Tiredness
- Problems with memory
- Find it hard to think or concentrate
- More emotional
- Irritability.

If you have any suspicions at all of concussions you must now issue the rider with a Blue Card, and they will not be able to compete again until they have provided medical clearance.



## 2. REMOVE

If a rider displays any concussion symptoms, make sure they:

- See a doctor within 24-48 hours
- Are with someone responsible for 1-2 hours
- Do not drink alcohol or go home by themselves
- Do not drive until being cleared by a doctor.

A rider should never return to riding on the day of a suspected or confirmed concussive injury.

## 3. REFER

**AT THIS POINT YOU MUST REFER THE RIDER TO A GP OR REGISTERED MEDICAL SPECIALIST. IDEALLY, THEY SHOULD SEE ONE WITHIN 48 HOURS AS THIS WILL ENSURE THEY RECEIVE THE BEST POSSIBLE ADVICE.**

Provided the concussion is a result of an accident, they will be eligible for funding assistance from ACC, for this incident, so advise them to complete forms for this upon treatment.

ACC also have a referral service to assist with recovery from Concussion/TBI. Doctors referrals/visits are free for under 15s - funded by ACC

Rider welfare is always a top priority to ESNZ. There will be instances when the rider, or even their parent, support person, coach, is of the opinion that the rider can continue riding and competing that day – they may have another horse or horses ready to compete in that same class or the next one.

As an official, it is important that you work with the event first aid person/s and put rider safety first. If you feel there is any doubt at all, and the rider is not 100%, it's crucial that they be sat out until they have been assessed and cleared by a registered medical professional.

There is NO negotiation around this – health and safety MUST be put first, always.



## OBSERVATION

Observation is vital. If you suspect a rider is acting out of the ordinary, and have any concerns about their safety at all, don't be afraid to talk to them quietly and ask them a few questions – which will ascertain whether they are 100% or not.

Unobserved falls or knocks around horses are not uncommon and riders may not speak out if this has happened to them, particularly if they are not feeling well.

Always be on the lookout for symptoms which may point to concussion or other serious injury.

# 4. RECOVER

**A CONCUSSION AFFECTS THE BRAIN'S ABILITY TO THINK AND PROCESS INFORMATION. AS A RESULT, THE RIDER MAY NEED TO MISS A FEW DAYS OF SCHOOL OR WORK. WHEN GOING BACK TO SCHOOL OR WORK SOME ATHLETES MAY NEED TO:**

1. Go back gradually
2. Make changes to their schedule so that symptoms do not get worse

# 5. RETURN

An athlete can return to riding and competition when:

1. They are symptom free
2. Have had the minimum 21 day stand down from all competition
3. Obtained medical clearance from a registered GP or registered medical specialist.





# OFFICIALS/FIRST AIDERS

## BEFORE THE EVENT

Ensure there is an official (PGJ, Judge, TD or Steward) and/or first aider available for the competition who is trained in Concussion evaluation and can issue Blue Cards.

## DURING THE COMPETITION

Record the name and ESNZ Registration number of any rider whom you issue a Blue Card to.

Discuss this with the rider and support person.

Provide the rider with a Concussion Check handout, which gives advice on what to watch for during the first 24-28 hours. Recommend they seek medical attention within 24 hours.

Ensure the rider has a support person to look after them and drive them home if necessary.

## IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE EVENT

issuing of the Blue Card on the rider's ESNZ profile:

- Notify the discipline Sport Manager, or ESNZ head office of the rider concussion
- Rider name and age, ESNZ membership number if possible
- Event details (show name, date, time)
- Details of the incident (did it occur in the field of competition, over a fence, etc)

The member will receive an email from ESNZ advising them of the Blue Card and that they need medical clearance to have this removed again (allowing them to compete).



Complete an Online Incident Report on the ESNZ website (Safety page).  
<https://www.nzequestrian.org.nz/safety/online-incident-report/>

It is vital that these reports are completed as we collect the data they provide us.

## ESNZ Incident Reporting Form

This form is to be completed for all horse related incidents.

**\* Required**

**Event Name and Venue: \***

Your answer

**Date of Event: \***

MM DD YYYY

/ / 2018

**Discipline: \***

Choose

**Time incident occurred: \***

Time

: AM

**Name and position of person filing this report: \***

Your answer



# GRADUATED RETURN TO RIDING (GRTR)

|         |                 |  |  |
|---------|-----------------|--|--|
| STAGE 1 | Days 1 - 2      |  | Relative Rest for 24-48 hours (i.e light activities of daily living that do not provoke symptoms are ok) <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Minimize screen time</li><li>• Gentle exercise (i.e. walking around the house)</li></ul>  |
| STAGE 2 | Days 2 – 13     | <i>Minimum of 24 hours between stages before progressing</i><br><br>Symptoms should be progressively <i>improving</i> .<br><br>If symptoms worsen drop back a stage. | Gradually introduce daily activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Activities away from school/work (introduce TV, increase reading, games etc)</li><li>• Exercise – light physical activity (e.g. short walks outside)</li></ul>  |
| STAGE 3 |                 |  | Increase tolerance for mental & exercise activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increase study/work-related activities with rest periods</li><li>• Increase intensity of exercise guided by symptoms</li></ul>   |
| STAGE 4 |                 |  | Return to work/study & sport training <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Part time return to work/education</li><li>• Start training activity without risk of head impact</li></ul>   |
| STAGE 5 | Earliest Day 14 |  | Return to normal work/study & sport-specific training <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Completion of Stages 1- 4 <b>AND</b></li><li>• Fully reintegrated into work or school <b>AND</b></li><li>• <b>Symptom free at rest</b></li><li>• <b>AND ≥ Day 14 post-injury</b> → reintegration into full sport-specific training can occur</li></ul>   |
| STAGE 6 | Earliest Day 21 |  | Return to sports competition <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Completion of Stage 5 <b>AND</b></li><li>• <b>Symptom free during sports training</b></li><li>• <b>AND ≥ Day 21 post-injury</b></li><li>• <b>AND</b> it is strongly recommended that the rider has received medical clearance from a qualified medical professional (from general practice or primary care team).</li></ul> |



# CONCUSSION SCENARIOS

1

A rider has fallen off immediately after the finish line. They are sitting upright and have no broken bones or major pain, more just discomfort. You ask them a few questions, which they answer easily and correctly. They get up on their feet and can walk without pain, but are quite slow and a bit sore.

About 10 minutes later the rider is quite clearly confused and keeps asking “what happened?”

## ANSWER:

*Help the rider to sit down somewhere, out of the elements. Make sure there is someone with them at all times. By now you are certain this rider has sustained a concussion so they will be issued with a Blue Card. Make sure they are not driving home and that they have someone who can look after them. Give their support person the Concussion info and advise them that the rider will need to be medically assessed and that they are currently stood down from further competition until they get a medical clearance.*

2

You are a Ground Jury at a small local Jumping event. A rider has fallen off over a fence in the competition arena (so is eliminated anyway) and is unconscious for several minutes. An ambulance is called and the rider comes around and is escorted out of the ring.

The ambulance arrives and the Officer proceeds to talk to the rider and ask them some questions. The ambulance officer declares that the rider is fit to continue.

## ANSWER:

*ESNZ General Regulation Article 150.7:*

*The Ground Jury may, at any time, exclude from further participation in a Competition or an entire Event any Athlete who is unfit to continue by reason of a serious or potentially serious injury, impairment, or health condition. Medical clearance, to compete again, must be given by a registered GP or registered medical specialist.*

*Talk to the President of the Ground Jury and advise them of your concerns, it will be up to them on whether this rider continues, or is issued a Blue Card.*



3

A rider comes in off a loop on their horse, and you notice (as a Ground Jury) that they have some dirt on their clothes. You notice that in the vet ring they seem to be repeating themselves when they normally wouldn't, and they look a bit dazed. What should the Ground Jury do?

**ANSWER:**

*Once they have come out of the vet ring, have a first aid person assess them, or assess them yourself. This will be done privately. If they "pass" the assessment it would be wise to check on them again before they ride again, or drive anywhere.*

4

While out on a loop Rider 1 observes from some distance away that Rider 2 falls off and is lying on the ground for a few minutes. By the time rider 1 reaches the spot, rider 2 has mounted and continued on their way. When rider 1 gets back to base they advise the GJ of what happened. The GJ speak with rider 2 who denies having fallen off, walks away and refuses to continue talking with the Ground Jury other than to say they will be riding again the following day. What should the Ground Jury do?

**ANSWER:**

*Insist that the rider have a thorough check over for concussion symptoms. If they refuse then a Yellow Card official warning may be used, but they will still need a concussion check and if they further refuse this they will not be allowed to ride the following day and will be issued with an automatic Blue Card, needing medical clearance before riding again.*

5

Rider falls off in the first class and has four horses tied up at the truck that are entered for the rest of the day. The official and the medic arrive at the truck to tell her she has been issued a Blue Card and cannot compete until she has been cleared again. The mother arrives and is furious and says she has driven all this way to compete and the child is fine.

**ANSWER:**

*The GJ must stand their ground and not let this rider compete again until she has been medically assessed and cleared. If the mother continues to act in a disruptive manner, and is a member of ESNZ (which she should be with a child riding), she may also be issued with a Yellow Card official warning.*



6

The officials are informed that a rider was injured after being kicked by a horse in the stables. The rider has not sought medical help as she is worried that the officials won't let her ride. But her friends have noticed she is not well and think she needs to be seen.

**ANSWER:**

*Out of competition riders can still be assessed and stood down so ensure this rider is not showing any signs of concussion or other serious injury. If there is any doubt at all she will be issued with a Blue Card.*

7

A rider issued with a Blue Card after falling from his horse and hitting his head badly has loaded his horses onto the truck and is preparing for a four hour trip home. The officials believe the person should not drive home, what can they do about this?

**ANSWER:**

*Advise the rider that they should not drive as it would pose a serious risk to themselves and others, and that they would break the law (NZTA 2.10.2) by driving without an assessment. It is likely that they will not be covered by their insurance.*

*Ask around if there is anyone else is going in the same direction who can drive for them, alternatively insist that they stay overnight at least before making the trip and do whatever it takes to ensure they do not drive themselves.*



**EQUESTRIAN SPORTS**  
NEW ZEALAND

Level 1, Panama House, 22 Panama Street  
PO Box 6146 Marion Square, Wellington 6141, New Zealand  
**P** +64 (4) 499 8994 **F** +64 (4) 471 0813

[nzequestrian.org.nz](http://nzequestrian.org.nz)