

## What You Need and Why

Also See USPC ["Top 5 things You Need in Pony Club"](#) and the [USPC "Safety Booklet"](#)

**Bit** *must* be the mildest and simplest that safely controls the horse. Snaffles (jointed, egg-butt, full cheek, and racing) are preferred. Twisted wire or copper bits are not allowed.

**Boots** *must* have a  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch heel to prevent feet from slipping through stirrup irons and must have hard soles because they slip out of the stirrups more easily. Hard-soled boots lessen injury if the foot is stepped on by a horse. Some brands of boots resemble athletic shoes and may be used. No waffle soles are allowed.



For unmounted Pony Club activities taking place near horses, acceptable footwear must be worn by members and parents: thick-soled boots (such as paddock boots) in good condition securely fastened, entirely closed, and covering the ankle. Canvas, cloth or open-toed shoes are not allowed.

**Halter (breakaway):** A breakaway halter is mandatory. Leather is favored over nylon since it will break when a horse pulls, thus lessening the chance of injury. A leather headpiece or breakaway twine in buckles work if there is no other option.



**Helmet:** (See also [USPC Safety Packet-Proper Helmet Fitting](#) and [TroxeL Helmet Fitting Guide](#).) Every rider, at every level, falls off at some time or another, so an equestrian helmet that is [ASTM/SEI](#) certified is critical (and mandatory). Bike helmets, or other sport helmets, are not designed for equestrian-related accidents and are not acceptable.



A helmet **must be worn** at all times when mounted, longeing, and is even suggested for grooming. The chinstrap must be fastened and a proper helmet fit is essential. Helmets **must** be ASTM/SEI approved. The ASTM (American Society for Testing and Materials) sets safety standards for many different materials, including those that go into sports equipment, e.g., protective helmets designed for equestrians. The ASTM consults with experts in various fields (including medical experts) and then sets standards for equestrian helmets. These standards include impact absorption and harness design and strength. When the standards are established, the job of the ASTM is finished until new developments in product design or engineering, or new medical information, make it necessary to revise and update the standards.

The ASTM sets the standards and the SEI (Safety Equipment Institute) checks on manufacturer compliance by testing the helmets. The SEI tests and inspects the various

models and types of helmets to ensure that they are manufactured to standards that meet or exceed current ASTM standards.

**Helmet fit.** Even the best safety helmet will not protect a rider's head if it does not fit properly. A bad fit can be dangerous, especially if the helmet slips down and blocks the rider's vision. Make sure the helmet fits snugly all the way around the rider's head. When wiggled back and forth, and side to side, the rider's scalp and eyebrows should move with it. If the helmet slides freely, a smaller size is needed. If it squeezes the rider's head uncomfortably, a larger size is needed.

**Shape of riding helmet.** If the helmet squeezes the rider's brow but still rocks freely side to side, it is too round. If it fits at the sides of the head but rocks back and forth, it is too oval. Many helmets come with fitting pads that slip into the inside hatband to solve these problems. Alternatively, a more round or more oval helmet design may fit better.

**Brim of riding helmet.** The helmet brim should rest  $\frac{1}{2}$  to 1 inch above the rider's eyebrows. If it sits higher, the rider is not getting full protection; lower and it could obscure vision. Some helmets can be adjusted with lacings or foam pads to rest lower or higher on the rider's head. Or, a style with a deeper or shallower crown may fit better.

**Chin Strap/Harness.** The most vital safety concern is that the helmet is buckled snugly. Helmets are made so that if the chinstrap is snug and the buckle is buckled, it cannot roll off the head.

**Helmet worn correctly.** The helmet should be level - the visor should not tip up or down. If the rider has long hair, it should be tied back at the nape of the neck, not shoved under the helmet as that will give a poor fit.

**Helmet lifespan.** It is recommended to replace a helmet every four years whether the rider has ever fallen in it or not. Wear and tear and the effects of time take a toll on the material. While a helmet should fit the same over time, sometimes the headliner, the soft material between the head and the hard, outer shell, compresses to make the helmet fit more loosely.

The "new helmet after a fall" rule is very good policy. Helmets work by internally collapsing their liners to absorb the shock of impact; a collapsed liner does not spring back into place. Since it is often impossible to see this collapse from either the inside or the outside, it is good sense to replace any helmet that has been in a fall and has done what it was designed to do. Helmets can be replaced - humans cannot.

**Important differences between equestrian helmets and bicycle helmets.** Bicycle helmets may seem sufficient for protecting a rider's head and they may be lighter, cooler and more comfortable than equestrian helmets. But, bike helmets are not designed to protect a rider's head when horseback riding! Bike crashes and falls from horses are not at all similar; therefore, the helmet designs are drastically different. The height of a fall from a horse is far greater than the height of a fall from a bicycle. Bicycle helmets are not designed to withstand impact from the height of a horse. Also, bike helmets are designed to protect the top of the head since most falls from bicycles are forward. Falls from horses occur in all directions, and the back and sides of the head are just as vulnerable as the top. These parts of the head are not protected by a bike helmet.

**Lead Rope:** a cotton lead rope will break if a horse pulls, thus lessening the chance of injury. Do not use lead ropes with bull snaps.

**Saddle:** *must* be appropriate, clean, in good condition, and properly fitted to horse and rider for horse comfort and to encourage a well-balanced riding position.

**Coggins Test & Equine Flu Documentation:** To insure that an animal is not harboring the virus which causes equine infectious anemia (EIA), a simple Coggins test is performed annually to check for EIA antibodies in the horse's blood. A positive test means that the horse has been infected with the EIA virus. A negative test means that he has not. Documentation of a negative test is required to prevent the transmission of EIA when horses are in close proximity to each other. See also the section "[Equine Infectious Anemia and the Coggins Test](#)" in this Handbook. Documentation of Flu/Rhino vaccination is also required.



### Attire (dress): Formal, Informal & Casual; Quiz

It is the COAT, not the tie, which determines whether dress is formal or informal. Attire requirements for **rallies** may be found in the appropriate [USPC Rulebook](#). Dress for **certification** is either formal, informal or casual, depending on the certificate level. Check the certificate level standards for exact attire requirements ([Standards of Proficiency D-1 through C-2](#) and [H/B through A](#)).

**Certifications:** Dress for **certificates** D1-D2 is usually casual. D-3 can be formal or informal. C1 and up is usually formal.

**Clinics:** Dress for **clinics** is generally informal, although it may be casual depending on local conditions. Check with the clinic organizer ahead of time to be sure how to dress.

**Lessons:** **Lesson** attire is usually casual. Pony Club Casual consists of clean, neat and workmanlike, polo shirt, breeches (with belt if there are loops), half chaps & paddock boots (or tall boots), helmet, medical armband or bracelet, and pin. Further information may be found in the "Dress and Turnout" chapter of the USPC D-Level Manual of Horsemanship. Attire that does not meet the standards for the activity (e.g., sports bras or spaghetti straps for lessons) is not acceptable and is considered disrespectful to the clinician and/or instructor. The clinician, instructor, District Commissioner (DC) and Adult-in-Charge (AIC) have every right to ask you to change into appropriate attire or to ask you to leave the lesson.



**Quiz:** For Quiz Rally your team will decide what to wear, but usually members dress in Pony Club Casual with khaki pants, shorts, or skirt. A belt can be worn if the pants have belt loops.