



Horseback Riding and Children

The National Safety Council occasionally is asked at what age a child can begin riding a horse. The simplest answer is that chronological age may not be the best measure of when a young person can ride.

Size, physical development, dexterity, strength, level of maturity and attitude of the person are among factors that ought to be considered, as well as age, before someone is allowed to mount a horse. For example: A ten-year old farm boy who has been around draft animals all his life would be more likely to feel comfortable riding on a horse than would a city-dwelling youngster of the same age whose only exposure to horses was having watched them in movies or on television.

Other considerations are: How big is the horse? What kind of animal is it— gentle, easily spooked, maverick; plow horse, race horse, kid's pony, etc? Where will the child ride—at a stable, in open fields, on an equestrian path, etc? Who will train the child to ride—a parent, brother or sister, other relative, friend, stable hand, pro trainer? Whose horse is it—family owned, stable stock, ranch circuit, etc?

Any child riding on a horse for the first time, and thereafter if necessary, should be accompanied by a responsible companion rider on another horse. Further information is available from the **American Medical Equestrian Association**, 103 Surrey Road, Waynesville, NC 28786, (704) 456-3392.