



IFHA Minimum Horse Welfare Standards

Version 1.4 (May 2020)

Acknowledgements

The IFHA Minimum Horse Welfare Standards outlined in section 4 of this document are based upon sections of the New Zealand Thoroughbred Racing (NZTR) “Thoroughbred Welfare Assessment Guidelines” (October 2019) which were developed by NZTR with the assistance of Professor Emeritus David Mellor, Foundation Director of the Animal Welfare Science and Bioethics Centre at Massey University, New Zealand.

Relevant further references:

D.J. Mellor (2016) Updating animal welfare thinking: Moving beyond the “Five Freedoms” towards “A Life Worth Living”. *Animals*, 6(21). doi:10.3390/ani6030021.

D.J. Mellor (2017) Operational details of the Five Domains Model and its key applications to the assessment and management of animal welfare. *Animals* 7(8), 60; doi:10.3390/ani7080060.

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IFHA minimum horse welfare standards

1. Preamble

The International Federation of Horseracing Authorities (IFHA) affirms the central role of the horse in racing and accordingly, regards the health and welfare of racehorses, in all stages of life, to be fundamentally important to the viability and sustainability of the industry.

In line with its terms of reference that includes promoting best practice, harmonisation and information exchange across Racing nations, the IFHA Horse Welfare Committee has produced this “IFHA Minimum Horse Welfare Standards” document as guidance on standards for the care and welfare of horses at different times of their life. These standards will complement recent reforms which will ensure the traceability of horses from their foal stage through into retirement and beyond.

Racing authorities should refer to this guidance to establish accepted horse welfare practices in their jurisdiction, and to set minimum standards of participant behaviour, including behavioural change where necessary.

2. Definition of horse welfare

Horse welfare is the physical and mental state of a horse in relation to the conditions in which it lives and dies.

A horse experiences good welfare if it is healthy, comfortable, well-nourished, safe, is not suffering from unpleasant states such as pain, fear and distress, and is able to express behaviours that are important for its physical and mental state, that is, it experiences “a life worth living”.

Good horse welfare requires disease prevention and appropriate veterinary care, shelter, management and nutrition, a stimulating and safe environment, humane handling and when necessary, humane euthanasia.

3. IGSRV welfare guidelines for racehorses

The International Group of Specialist Racing Veterinarians (IGSRV) is an association that unites regulatory racing veterinarians worldwide and plays a major role in promoting the welfare and integrity of horse racing through providing advice to racing administrators on matters such as racehorse health and welfare and drug control policy.

The IGSRV Welfare Guidelines for Horseracing provide a benchmark for welfare standards deemed acceptable and aim to provide clarity and accountability around racehorse welfare before, during, and also after racing. The key tenets of these Guidelines include the following:

- Reasonable steps should be taken to prevent unnecessary pain and distress of racehorses in breeding, racing and training by ensuring adequate care, a suitable diet, the ability to exhibit normal behaviour, appropriate housing, and protection from injury and disease.
- While horse racing carries risks, reasonable steps should be taken to prevent avoidable risks and research should be undertaken to reduce risks, and to share this information between participants in horseracing.
- In the context of these responsibilities it is recognised that properly conducted euthanasia can be the most humane option and the best welfare outcome for racehorses; for example, for individual horses with severe or chronic injuries, or where care would be inadequate, and long-term pain and distress is likely to be the result.

1. At all stages during the preparation and presentation of horses for racing, their welfare should be a primary consideration

a) Good Horse Management - the housing, feeding and training of racehorses should be consistent with good horse management and must not compromise their welfare.

b) Training Methods for Racehorses - pre-training and training methods which unreasonably influence the normal behaviour of racehorses should not be used. Horses should only be given training schedules which are suited to their physical capabilities and level of maturity.

c) Shoeing - horseshoes and racing plates should be designed and fitted to minimise the risk of injury.

d) Transport - the risk of injury and disease should be minimised during transportation. Vehicles should be safe, clean, well ventilated, regularly maintained and disinfected. Long journeys must be planned carefully, and horses allowed regular rest periods and access to water. Respiratory problems arising from transport can often be reduced if horses are able to lower their heads to ground level during rest periods.

2. Horses should be suitably conditioned and healthy before being allowed to race

a) Veterinary Examinations - a veterinary examination should be undertaken of any horse showing signs of disease, lameness or other ailments to determine its suitability to race.

b) Immaturity - horses mature at widely different rates. Training and racing schedules should be carefully planned to minimise the risk of musculoskeletal injuries.

c) Surgical Procedures - any surgical procedure which compromises the welfare or safety of any horse or rider must not be allowed in racing.

d) Severe or Recurrent Conditions - horses with severe or recurrent clinical conditions should, on veterinary advice, be temporarily or permanently excluded from racing.

e) Pregnant Mares - mares must not be raced beyond 120 days of pregnancy.

3. Conditions of racing should not prejudice horse welfare

a) Racecourse Conditions - racecourses and racing surfaces should be designed and maintained to reduce risk factors which may lead to injuries. Attention should be paid to rails, crossings, uneven racing surfaces and extremes of surface quality.

b) Steeplechasing and Hurdling - participation in these races should be restricted to horses with a demonstrated level of fitness and jumping ability. Weights to be carried, race distances, and the number, size, design and placement of fences should all be carefully assessed when planning these races.

c) Extreme Weather - due care and attention should be paid to the welfare of horses racing in extreme weather. Provision must be made to cool horses quickly after racing in hot and/or humid conditions.

d) Misuse of the Whip - excessive, unnecessary or improper use of whips must not be condoned, for example, on a horse that is clearly out of contention, a horse that is fatigued and unable to respond, or a horse clearly winning.

e) Medication - after any veterinary treatment, sufficient time should be allowed for recuperation before competition. Drugs must not be allowed to modify the racing performance of the horse, adversely impact on its welfare or conceal adverse genetic or acquired conditions.

f) Starting Gates/Barriers - horses should be educated to be familiar with loading procedures. Barriers should be appropriately designed and safe. Aids to loading must be humane and used appropriately.

g) Racecourse accommodation - stabling and sampling facilities for horses on racecourses should be safe, clean and well-ventilated. Suitable drinking and washing-down water must always be available. Safe facilities for loading and unloading horses should be provided.

4. Racehorses should receive proper attention after they have raced and be treated humanely when their racing careers are over

a) Veterinary Treatment - when a horse is injured during a race, the jockey must dismount and whenever possible and safe to do so, attempt to restrain the injured horse. A registered veterinarian must be in attendance on the racecourse at race meetings and official barrier trials. Injured horses must be given appropriate first aid. A suitable vehicle for moving injured horses from the racetrack must always be available. If required, an injured horse should be transported to the nearest referral centre for further assessment and therapy.

b) Racing Injuries - the incidence of injuries sustained in racing and training should be monitored wherever possible. Track conditions, frequency of racing, age and any other risk factors should be carefully examined to identify and minimise the risk of injury.

c) Euthanasia - if injuries are sufficiently severe, euthanasia may be the best welfare outcome for the horse. If euthanasia is deemed necessary, it should be undertaken as soon as possible with the sole aim of minimising suffering.

d) Retirement – trainers have a responsibility to retire racehorses in a condition that best places them to transition to their next career. Owners must ensure that their horses are sympathetically and humanely treated when they leave racing. Horseracing Authorities must have procedures in place to permanently identify and register racehorses to ensure their ongoing traceability, including after successive changes in ownership, so that end-of-life outcomes can be monitored, and instances of mistreatment can be pursued.

4. IFHA minimum horse welfare standards

A useful tool in devising minimum horse welfare standards is the “Five Domains Model” of animal welfare. This model assists in defining optimal and minimal provisions, and identifies a range of husbandry, veterinary and equitation impacts on horse welfare. The aim is to reduce avoidable negative experiences and ensure horses enjoy a “life worth living” at all stages of life.

The five domains are:

1. Nutrition – enough water and food, balanced and varied diet
2. Environment – comfortable and safe environment
3. Health – wellbeing and fitness, injuries and ailments appropriately treated
4. Behaviour – able to express natural and rewarding behaviours
5. Mental or affective state – comfortable in environment, sociable contact and bonding with other animals, close bond between horse and human.

1. Nutrition

Desired or optimal welfare conditions would be provided where racehorses are able to:

- drink enough water
- eat enough food
- eat a balanced diet including essential trace minerals
- eat a variety of foods aligned to innate preferences
- eat at a natural rate and timing
- eat correct quantities

Minimum acceptable welfare conditions for racehorses may not be met in circumstances where:

- insufficient quantities of food and water are made available
- temperature, taste and or odour of water discourage horses from drinking
- food quality is poor or unpalatable or additives make the taste unpleasant
- regular eating patterns are disturbed
- horses indulge in voluntary overeating
- horses are not fed to meet their metabolic requirements
- horses are over-fat or very thin

2. Environment

Desired or optimal welfare conditions are achieved where racehorses are provided accommodation with:

- safe enclosures made from appropriate materials with opportunities for shade and shelter
- a thermally comfortable environment
- suitable ground surfaces in stables, yards and paddocks, and training and racing venues
- space for free movement
- fresh air
- comfortable light intensity
- acceptable noise exposure
- familiar routines and consistent environment
- familiarisation with normal activity

Stabling and the general environment provided to horses in racing and breeding should normally include the following features:

- safe containment
- use of substantial and/or electric fencing to reinforce boundaries – providing social barriers, reducing injuries, and protecting horses
- predictability and routine that protects horses
- farms that are well set up to manage herd hierarchies
- pasture based management of mares and young stock which allows expression of natural behaviours
- stable, barn and paddock management and maintenance that provide good hygiene
- good air quality
- comfortable variation in light and temperature
- handling and husbandry of transported horses which is appropriate

Transport – only horses which are in a suitable condition should be transported, and under the supervision of adequately trained personnel. Vehicles should be safe, clean, well ventilated, regularly maintained and disinfected. Long journeys must be planned carefully, and horses should be allowed regular rest periods and access to water. Respiratory problems arising from transport can often be reduced if horses are able to lower their heads to ground level during rest periods.

Minimum acceptable welfare conditions for racehorses may not be met in circumstances which include:

- thermal extremes
- unsuitable ground surface
- lack of hygiene due to, for example, failure to remove faeces and urine-soaked bedding from stables
- sustained close confinement
- prolonged periods of road transportation in dirty and poorly ventilated vehicles
- atmospheric pollutants (CO₂, ammonia, dust, smoke)
- unpleasant or strong odours due to poor hygiene
- inappropriate light intensity
- environmental monotony (ambient, physical, lighting)

- unpredictable noise or events
- unsafe enclosures and risk for injury
- exposure to toxic plants

3. Health

In general, an industry-wide high regard for the health and wellbeing of racehorses is demonstrated by:

- the provision of routine preventative health care, and when required, expert equine veterinary care
- industry training of industry personnel
- good regulatory control
- veterinary checks conducted before and after a race to assess fitness to race and recovery
- conditioning and fitness preparation which is done appropriately for age and stage of preparation
- positive human-horse interaction conferring health benefits
- prevention of the spread of contagious disease

Desired or optimal welfare conditions would be provided where racehorses are regularly observed and appropriately treated when necessary to ensure that:

- chronic injuries, and acute or contagious disease or conditions are well managed
- acute injuries are well managed
- vaccinations are conducted in line with local guidelines, and in the case of international travel, according to the guidelines of the relevant importing countries
- elective surgeries are expertly conducted in line with regulations
- therapeutic substances are used appropriately and under veterinary supervision
- body and coat condition, foot care and dental care are appropriate
- good fitness level, posture, demeanour and gait are apparent

Minimum acceptable welfare conditions may not be met in circumstances where:

- contagious diseases or conditions are present
- acute or unmanaged chronic injury or unsoundness is present
- therapeutic substances are used inappropriately, or prohibited substances are used in competition
- there is extreme obesity or leanness
- there is poor physical fitness and loss of muscle condition

4. Behaviour

The horse-human bond enables breeders, trainers, and handlers to recognise the many subtle behavioural cues that are indicators of welfare, reinforced by:

- regular consistent contact which builds familiarity with each individual horse's behaviour
- daily interaction with horses which allows behaviours to be observed
- a culture of empathy and concern for horse wellbeing
- horses having scheduled routines of exercise, feed and rest
- horses having varied environmental challenges and choices and opportunities for engaging in rewarding behaviours
- appropriate and consistent training and management practices, ideally using graduated learning training practices with positive reinforcement

Desirable or best possible conditions that would optimise the welfare of racehorses include the following:

- comfortable sensory inputs
- engaging activities
- training based on graduated training practices supported by positive reinforcement of the horse's learning
- opportunities for spontaneous free movement
- opportunities to respond to varied environmental challenges
- opportunities for foraging and browsing
- opportunities to bond with other animals and with humans
- opportunities to play
- opportunities to use safe spaces, retreat, or defensive activity
- having sufficient sleep and rest.

Minimum acceptable welfare conditions may not be met in circumstances where horses exhibit the following behaviours:

- stereotypies
- resistance or lack of cooperation when worked or handled
- lethargy
- exhaustion

5. Mental or affective state

Breeders, trainers and handlers depend on healthy and willing horses, so they will regularly monitor their mental state for:

- alertness and engagement with handlers
- willingness to work
- confidence and calmness
- the absence of signs of anxiety, fear or panic
- the absence of signs of pain, anger or frustration

Desired or optimal welfare conditions for racehorses would be provided where:

- management provisions meet nutritional, environmental, health and behavioural requirements
- negative experiences are kept at tolerably low levels
- opportunities are available for positive experiences

Minimum acceptable welfare conditions for horses may not be met in circumstances where:

- provision for nutritional, environmental, health and behavioural requirements have not been met
- horses have negative experiences that exceed tolerably low levels
- horses have no or few opportunities for positive experiences