



IFHA Minimum Horse Welfare Guidelines

Version 2.3 (June 2023)

Acknowledgements

The International Federation of Horseracing Authorities (IFHA) Minimum Horse Welfare Guidelines outlined in section 5 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.

Table of Contents

1. Preamble	4
2. Definition of horse welfare	4
3. General health and wellbeing	5
4. Horse handlers	5
5. IFHA minimum horse welfare guidelines	6
1. Nutrition	6
2. Environment	7
3. Health	7
4. Behaviour	9
5. Mental or affective state	10
Appendix 1 - IGSRV welfare guidelines for horseracing	11
Appendix 2 - IHSC Horse Welfare Charter	12

IFHA minimum horse welfare guidelines

1. Preamble

The IFHA publishes the International Agreement on Breeding, Racing and Wagering (IABRW) which brings together a series of articles, appendices and guidelines setting out recommended best practices for racing, breeding, stud book administration and wagering, common to all jurisdictions.

The IFHA, in its role of promoting good regulation and best practices internationally, recognises the central role played by the horse 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 all activities involving Thoroughbreds, optimising the health, safety and welfare of the horse should remain foremost in all decision-making from beginning to end of life.

The IFHA also recognises the diversity of climatic, cultural, political, legislative and other perspectives that underpin approaches to animal welfare around the world. Accordingly, it has adopted a number of broad principles of racehorse welfare for implementation by the IFHA's members into detailed local outputs to assure racehorse welfare.

In line with its terms of reference that include promoting best practice, harmonisation and information exchange across racing nations, the IFHA Horse Welfare Committee has produced this "IFHA Minimum Horse Welfare Guidelines" document as guidance for the care and welfare of horses at different times of their life. This is the 2nd edition of the document, which has been reviewed and updated to ensure that the guidelines are consistent with current knowledge and evolving contemporary values.

Racing authorities should refer to this guidance to establish accepted horse welfare practices in their jurisdiction, and to inform minimum standards of participant behaviour, and drive 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 wellbeing, 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. General health and wellbeing

3.1 Routine health care and biosecurity measures should always be maintained for racehorses:

- a) Vaccination, worm and other parasite control and disease monitoring and implementation, to include appropriate hygiene and isolation procedures, should always be in place. Local guidance on parasite and tick control and a de-worming programs should be sought to reduce the risk of infestation and worm burden. This should involve consultation with a veterinarian where appropriate. Local guidance on vaccinations should be sought and administered according to veterinary guidance and industry regulations.
- b) Teeth should be inspected by a veterinarian or a trained equine dental technician at least once a year and rasped or otherwise treated if necessary.
- c) Hooves should be inspected and trimmed regularly by a farrier or competent person. Particular attention should be paid to a horse's hoof balance and whether equal weight is being placed on all four legs.
- d) Veterinary advice and support should be sought for all ailments.

3.2 Depending upon the management system in place, a horse's health and wellbeing should be evaluated regularly to ensure:

- alertness and interest in their surroundings
- eating and drinking is normal
- passing urine and faeces in normal amounts and appearances
- weight bearing is even on all four legs
- mucous membranes are pink
- normal temperature, which should be approximately 37.5-38.5°C / 99-101°F, heart rate (36-40 beats per minute) and respiration (8-15 breaths per minute)
- no outward signs of abnormal behaviour, discomfort, distress, sweating or pacing
- no discharge from the eyes, nose, navel, rectum or genitalia
- coat is glossy, supple and lying flat
- no abnormal swelling or noticeable heat on the body
- sufficient hydration - skin recoils in a couple of seconds
- normal capillary refill (after pressing a thumb against the horse's gum, the colour returns almost immediately)
- no skeletal abnormalities or broken skin

4. Horse handlers

It is important to recognise the role of the people that look after horses on a daily basis. It is vital that those working with horses understand and accept responsibility for the welfare of the horses in their care. Every person responsible for the supervision of horses should be provided with adequate training, and continuous development and training should be encouraged amongst all those responsible for the care and welfare of horses.

5. IFHA minimum horse welfare guidelines

A useful tool in devising minimum horse welfare guidelines 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

Good nutrition implies the provision of a diet adjusted to maintain optimal health and fitness and access to safe water. The animal welfare aims of good nutrition are to minimise thirst and hunger and to ensure eating is a pleasurable experience.

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
- horses must compete or fight with other more dominant individuals when fed in a group

Body condition score (BCS) is a useful indicator of the nutritional health of horses. Factors other than nutrition that contribute to body condition, such as training workload, age, disease or thermal extremes, also need to be taken into account. An example of a system

of BCS is that of Carroll and Huntington¹, pursuant to which horses of any age or occupation should be maintained between BCS 2 to 4.

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
- appropriate shelter and rugging during cold weather
- handling and husbandry of transported horses which is appropriate

(Only horses which are in a suitable condition should be transported, and under the supervision of adequately trained personnel.)

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

- thermal extremes

¹ Carroll, C.L. and Huntington, P.J. (1988) Body condition scoring and weight estimation of horses, *Equine Veterinary Journal* 20, 41-45) – accessible at <https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/livestock-and-animals/horses/health-and-welfare/condition-scoring-and-weight-estimation>.

- 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 transportation in dirty and/or 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

Good health is achieved through the prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment of disease, injury and functional impairment, and through fostering good exercise conditioning and where possible, free exercise.

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
- there is toxicity-induced health problems

4. Behaviour

The expression of normal behaviours is facilitated through the provision of sufficient space, proper facilities, compatible company and appropriately varied conditions. Handlers should be mindful that horses are social animals and live in a herd in the natural state.

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

Positive mental experiences are facilitated through the provision of safe, compatible and appropriate opportunities to have pleasurable experiences.

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

Appendix 1

IGSRV welfare guidelines for horseracing

The International Group of Specialist Regulatory 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 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, in certain circumstances, be the most humane option and the best welfare outcome; 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.

The IGSRV welfare guidelines for horseracing can be found at: <https://igsrv.org/welfare-statement/>

Appendix 2

International Horse Sports Confederation (IHSC) Horse Welfare Charter

The IFHA and the Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI) joined forces in 2013 to create the International Horse Sports Confederation (IHSC), the first formal vehicle for co-operation between the world's leading bodies for equestrian sport. The key mission of the IHSC is to encourage cooperation and the exchange of information on all matters of mutual interest between the IFHA and the FEI, as well as representing the collective interests of the horse industry with the World Organisation for Animal Health (formerly OIE) and other international bodies.

The IHSC Horse Welfare Charter can be found at:

<https://www.horsesport.org/downloads/IHSC%20Welfare%20Charter%20version%2011%20August%202020.pdf>