

From:

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To:

USPC Horse Management Committee
USPC Safety Committee

October 28, 2020.

Helmet Fit, Safety, and Hair

Our Region's working group on diversity and inclusion issues has recently been discussing helmet fit and helmet safety, in the context of accommodating different hairstyles. Different hairstyles can impact the fit of a rider's helmet. We recognize that this is a safety issue which needs to be addressed for members of USPC.

We have seen this raised in connection with some Black female riders with natural hair in different styles, but it is an issue of concern for riders in all racial and ethnic groups, as the issue is really one of how to deal safely with a large quantity of hair. For example, long-haired White girls are typically encouraged to put their hair up into a helmet using a hair-net, which also impacts helmet fit. Trainers, instructors, officers, and parents may not know how to achieve good helmet fit with different hairstyles, nor how to approach a conversation about this topic in an appropriate and positive way.

Information on the USPC website about this topic is somewhat inconsistent:

- (1) *Helmet Fit: Horse Management lesson plan (D-Level)* - mentions hair in the conclusion. It does not offer the instructor or the members any practical advice on safe hairstyles, hair decorations, pony-tails and buns etc, in the context of helmet safety.
<https://www.ponyclub.org/ContentDocs/Instruction/LessonPlansHM/D-1-D-2-D-3%20Helmet%20Fitting.pdf>
- (2) *Safe Attire: Horse Management lesson plan (D-1)* - talks about helmets but does not mention hair at all. NB - This lesson is listed under Turnout/Tack and not Safety.
<https://www.ponyclub.org/Instructors/LessonPlans/HorseManagement.aspx>
- (3) *Safety Handbook - Chapter IV, Riding Attire* (reproduced in the HM Rulebook) does not mention the potential impact of hair on helmet fit. Appendix A states that helmet manufacturers say it doesn't matter if your hair is worn up or down so long as the helmet fits. However, if you wear your hair in a range of styles, safety may require you to own more than one helmet or to have a helmet that is easier to adjust. The CDC information sheet -
https://www.cdc.gov/headsup/pdfs/helmets/HeadsUp_HelmetFactSheet_Equestrian_508.pdf - which USPC links to on <https://www.ponyclub.org/Volunteers/Safety/Default.aspx> specifically makes the point that a change in hairstyle may require changes to the

helmet. Other considerations include hair decorations including beads and clips. Are these approved or not under the Safety Checklist in Appendix C?

<https://www.ponyclub.org/ContentDocs/Volunteers/Safety/Pony%20Club%20Safety%20Handbook%202019%20print.pdf>

- (4) *Safety FAQs* - This document states that “Once you have a well-fitted helmet, with hair up or down, it is imperative to wear the hair the same way, either up or down, to maintain the safe fit.”

<https://www.ponyclub.org/ContentDocs/Volunteers/Safety/SAFETY%20FAQs%202019.pdf>

A related and unaddressed question is whether USPC would approve a female rider to wear the hijab with a helmet, and what needs to be understood for safety in this case. See this UK media story of an amateur female jockey for an example. <https://en.vogue.me/culture/khadijah-mellah-first-british-jockey-win-race-wearing-hijab/>

We note that there are numerous videos available on the internet from reputable retailers and helmet manufacturers which give clear advice on helmet fit. (Middle California Region plans to add links to some of these to our website.) Some videos address the basic question of “pony tail in the helmet or not” but there is very little discussion of how to assist a rider who has very curly hair, braids, or another hairstyle that takes up more space on how to achieve a really good, safe helmet fit.

Abriana Johnson and Caitlin Gooch of *Young Black Equestrians The Podcast* - <https://www.youngblackequestrians.com/> - are reaching a wide audience via social media and are among influencers who could be approached for advice and collaboration.

We are not proposing that USPC form an opinion on whether particular hairstyles are - or are not - appropriate or safe for horse riding. Our request is that USPC:

- (1) ensure consistency in discussion of hair and helmet safety on the USPC website between different pages;
- (2) find ways to improve understanding of this topic among instructors and members by providing clear guidance;
- (3) use its influence to encourage helmet manufacturers to produce helmet fitting information which addresses the needs of diverse riders;
- (4) add more video instruction to the USPC website on helmet fit, possibly in collaboration with a helmet manufacturer. (This might also provide an opportunity to engage a helmet manufacturer for sponsorship of USPC!)
- (5) use images of riders from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds to illustrate good helmet fit.