

## Guidelines for Racing in Cold Weather

While horseracing can be safely conducted in cold weather, extreme cold, wind, snow, sleet, freezing rain and/or frozen racetracks can place both horses and people at increased risk for hypothermia, frostbite and/or musculoskeletal injury.

Racetrack personnel continually monitor the ambient temperature, wind strength, moisture in the air (rain, snow, or sleet), and the condition of the racing surface to make real-time assessment of the ability of horses and the jockeys or drivers to safely race. Although well-conditioned and acclimated horses and people are capable of racing safely in cold weather, individual susceptibility to cold weather injury can vary significantly among horses and people. A hard racetrack surface increases the risk for musculoskeletal injury, particularly with a stone dust harness surface. An icy or snow-covered racetrack, or conditions of decreased visibility, particularly at night, are unsafe regardless of the ambient temperature.

The National Weather Service Wind Chill Temperature Index uses computer modeling to provide an accurate, understandable, and useful formula for calculating the dangers from winter winds and freezing temperature. The Index is available locally and is updated hourly. If the Index is forecast to be **minus 18 F or below**, the risk for cold weather injury is extreme and the racetrack regulatory veterinarian, stewards or judges, trainers, jockeys or drivers, and racetrack management must collectively determine whether racing should be cancelled. For the benefit of all concerned, racing cancellation decisions should be made from forecasted weather 24- to 48- hours in advance of a scheduled race card.

Horses are closely observed by regulatory veterinarians before and during a race, and as they leave the racetrack. Symptoms of hypothermia in horses may include shivering, depression, irregular heart rate, low body temperature, abnormal breathing, dark colored urine, and dehydration. Horses showing clinical signs of hypothermia should be monitored until their body temperature returns to normal (101°F). Horses with a persistently low body temperature or other clinical signs mentioned above should receive veterinary attention.

If racing is conducted in cold weather, existing best practices to minimize the risk for cold weather injury include but are not limited to:

- Carefully warming the horse up before the race.
- Cooling the horse out with a blanket and providing warm water to drink after the race.
- Washing the horse with minimal water and making liberal use of towels to dry the horse. covering the horse with a dry blanket before leaving the barn or paddock for home.

- In serious situations, the horse ambulance will come immediately to assist.
- Track veterinarians are equipped to treat any horse experiencing issues with the cold weather.

Consult with your private veterinarian for additional information for prevention and treatment of cold weather-related concerns. In some of the more severe cases, shipping to a veterinary clinic with climate-controlled stalls may be appropriate post-race.

People involved in winter racing must take similar care, as exposed skin is especially vulnerable to frostbite. People working outdoors in cold weather must dress with multiple layers (inner layer, insulation layer, and outer layer) that cover every part of their body and keep them dry. Gloves, a scarf or knit mask to cover their face and mouth, and a water-resistant coat and boots should be considered. People should be alert for clinical signs of hypothermia and frostbite in themselves and others and seek warm shelter and medical attention if symptoms of hypothermia are evidenced. These symptoms include shivering, tingling or numbness of the extremities, confusion, drowsiness, muscle stiffness or slurred speech.

Thank you for your efforts to provide the best possible care for your horses. As stewards of the horse, we must do whatever we can to ensure their health and safety.

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