

GET READY FOR SUMMER!

A RIDING CAMP PRIMER FOR PARENTS

Spring is in the air, but your youngsters are dreaming of summer – and yearning to spend it in the saddle.

What's a parent to do? If you don't have equines of your own, a summer riding program or camp might be the answer. However, the time to register is now, as these programs often fill up early.

Here are a few riding camp basics to get you started.

A Camp by Any Other Name ...

Sometimes a riding program is a riding program, and sometimes it's actually a camp. Many of Maryland's summer programs are one to two-week extensions of existing lesson programs, and thus qualify as "day camps."

Most camps are co-educational and divided into age groups, so make sure that you register your child with the correct group. In addition, there are often strict requirements with regard to pick-up and drop-off times, with extra charges for early drop-off or late pick-up. Obviously, you need to choose a camp with a schedule that fits yours. If someone other than a family member will be picking up the child, parental permission may be required.

Activities & Equipment

When shopping for a summer riding program, be aware that instruction is offered in different disciplines, from English and hunter/jumper style riding to Western, saddle seat, dressage, mounted games and even polo. Some camps combine disciplines, such as those that focus on three-day eventing (dressage, cross-country and show jumping). Stable management skills – from grooming a horse and bandaging its legs to equine nutrition and cleaning tack – are also taught in some programs. If you're not certain what's on offer, be sure to inquire.

While you're at it, ask about equipment requirements. Children attending these programs are expected to have good, sturdy footwear and a riding helmet that fits well. Sometimes a riding crop (whip) is a good idea, too. However, don't assume that the camp will provide this equipment, and don't assume that just any shoe, helmet or crop will do. It's best to ask

about the specifics before hitting the tack shops. If you're unsure where to purchase this equipment, camp officials can steer you in the right direction. In addition, many local shops sell used equipment. When you purchase these items, label them clearly with your child's name.

What else will your child need? Are lunches and drinks provided, for example, or should each child bring his own? If the camp requires any medical paperwork, health insurance documentation or proof of vaccination, it's best to ascertain that in advance. If your child needs any medication, that will need to be packed, as well, and the camp staff informed about it.

Many equestrian-oriented camps offer alternative activities, such as swimming, boating, hiking, art and crafts, and more. Again, will your child need a swimsuit, crafts materials, or other items in order to participate? How about sunscreen, insect repellent, or a change of clothes?

Last but not least: Does the facility have an indoor arena, in case of rain or extreme heat? If not, are there substitute activities planned for "bad weather" days? What are the school mounts like, and are there trusty ponies available for the tiniest children? All are worthwhile questions, and might warrant a visit to the facility.

Safety First

Illness can strike at any time, and accidents will happen. To this end, the camp's application form should spell out its medical policy and procedures. If it does not, be sure to get this information in writing.

Safety in the saddle should be a priority, and that responsibility rests with the camp director and instructors. Here in Maryland, directors and instructors must meet certain standards of training and/or experience in order to operate summer riding programs. Certification at the state or national level is highly desirable. Because many riding stables recruit their summer instructors from their year-round lesson students, many of those stables have also instituted in-house certification programs for interested students.

Before signing on the dotted line, it wouldn't hurt to bone up

on the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's regulations and certification requirements for summer riding programs. These include a medical program, employees properly certified in CPR and first aid by a national organization, access to a professional health care supervisor or consultant, medical logs, reports and forms, personal health records, immunization requirements, health treatment area, and procedures for medical emergencies, etc. In addition, they cover various basic facility requirements related to food service or food storage, water, sewage disposal, toilet or privy facilities, and hand washing facilities. Also addressed: sleeping and bathing facilities in overnight camps, as well as certain maintenance programs for insects and rodents, rabies, fire and other hazards.

For a look at these regulations, go to www.dsd.state.md.us. On the left side, choose "COMAR Online." Then choose Search Option #3, "Access Through Table Of Contents Structure." From the Title list, choose: Health &

Mental Hygiene, Department of (Title 10). From the Subtitles list, choose: 16 Housing. Next, select 10.16.06 Certification for Youth Camps. Each regulation is listed separately; choose COMAR 10.16.06.01 through 10.16.06.55.

Finally, because horseback riding carries certain inherent risks, most riding programs will ask you to sign a form releasing the program, its instructors and the facility owners from any liability. This is standard procedure.

Now let the fun begin!



CERTIFICATION FOR YOUTH CAMPS

If you own or manage a stable that runs any sort of summer riding program, you need to be certified by the Maryland Department of Health & Mental Hygiene. Administrators of new youth camps can download applications and related forms from the following website: http://www.cha.state.md.us/ofpchs/comm_srv/ycamp.html.

The Maryland Department of Health & Mental Hygiene's Division of Community Services offers two types of youth camp training. Space is limited, so please make arrangements to attend as soon as possible. For more information, contact Shirley Fox, Division of Community Services, 410- 767-8417; fax 410-333-8926; e-mail Sfox@dhmh.state.md.us.

NEW CAMP DIRECTORS:

For new camps and new directors, training on essential requirements to operate a youth camp and obtain a youth camp certificate

Tuesday, March 20

10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Howard County

Tuesday, April 10

10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Baltimore City

HOT TOPICS:

For every camp director, training on new requirements and focus on special topics such as medications at camp, staff training and transportation safety issues

Tuesday, March 13

10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Annapolis

Tuesday, April 17

10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Howard County

Tuesday, May 8

10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Baltimore City

