



[Middleburg, Virginia] — [April 16, 2026] — Since 1995, the Virginia Steeplechase Association (VSA), in collaboration with veterinarians conducting pre-race examinations, has collected data on injuries and fatalities in steeplechase races in Virginia. This initiative later expanded to include races across seven states within the steeplechase circuit sanctioned by the National Steeplechase Association (NSA).

In the early years of data collection, fatalities in steeplechase racing were at an unacceptable level. Although rates vary annually, recent years have seen a marked decline with much lower fatality rates according to the NSA Safety Committee. This improvement is attributed to enhanced pre-race examinations, modifications to courses and fences, and ongoing educational programs for trainers and jockeys.

Injuries resulting in lameness have also been tracked and observed to fluctuate from year to year over the past decade. While injuries and fatalities are recorded at or immediately following each race, the NSA Safety Committee recognizes that some race-related conditions may not become evident until days later.

“We know some injuries that occur during a race don’t become apparent until days afterward,” said Dr. Reynolds Cowles, NSA Equine Medical Director and Chair of the Safety Committee. “Until we understand the full extent of these delayed injuries, we cannot accurately determine their total number or how best to prevent them.”

To better quantify the full scope of race-related injuries, Dr. Cowles,

Don Yovanovich, President of the VSA and Dr. Nat White, Professor Emeritus of Equine Surgery at Virginia Tech have received a grant from the Virginia Horse Industry Board to investigate the occurrence of “latent injuries” associated with steeplechase racing.

The primary objective of the study is to determine how many horses that appear uninjured during and immediately after a race subsequently develop signs of injury—such as heat, swelling, lameness, or fracture—within four days following competition. This information is currently unavailable but is essential for improving injury prevention strategies and enhancing the health and welfare of horses participating in the sport.

The study protocol involves contacting trainers of all horses participating in race meets in 2026 to identify horses in which injuries become apparent after the event, require treatment, or delay a horse’s return to training. A secondary objective is to identify potential risk factors associated with these injuries. “With this information, we can better understand how to make racing safer for horses,” Cowles added.

“We are fortunate to have the generous support of the Virginia Horse Industry Board, which has made this study possible,” said Yovanovich. “Regardless of the final results, this research will expand our understanding of racing-related injuries and provide insights that can be applied to other equine disciplines to improve horse health and welfare.”

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