

Guidance Note: Use of Sedatives or Tranquillisers During Ridden Exercise

Issued 31 July, 2025

Note: For the purposes of this guidance, the term "sedatives" includes tranquilisers.

The use of sedatives during routine ridden exercise warrants careful consideration, particularly with respect to the safety of both rider and horse. Their use may also have implications for insurance coverage and trainers' workplace health and safety obligations. It is the veterinarian's responsibility to ensure that any dispensed medication is clearly justified, correctly documented and monitored for both adverse effects and the horse's response to treatment.

Sedation during routine exercise is generally not recommended, except in specific, limited circumstances where its use is clearly justified on clinical grounds. This is primarily due to concerns about the potential effects of such medications on the horse's coordination, which may impact rider safety, as well as the risk that sedation may obscure rather than address, underlying behavioural, training or management issues.

The usefulness of sedatives as a training aid is limited by their potential to impair the horse's awareness, responsiveness to cues and capacity for learning, thereby reducing the effectiveness of training and ultimately failing to address the underlying behavioural issues for which the medication was administered.

Where sedatives are used, they must be prescribed by a registered veterinary surgeon and supported by a clear, evidence-based clinical rationale. Clear written instructions must be provided outlining the appropriate use, dosage and method of administration. The prescribing veterinarian is responsible for documenting the product used, dosage, timing and intended purpose, and for ensuring that the horse's response is closely and appropriately monitored throughout the course of treatment.

Examples of responsible use include:

- As part of a structured rehabilitation programme under veterinary supervision, for example, following injury or surgery, to enable carefully controlled light exercise for a defined period without increasing the risk of re-injury.
- Where treatment is clinically indicated and clearly justified by the prescribing veterinarian, with appropriate documentation and supervision maintained throughout the effective period of the medication.

Trainers are also reminded of their obligations under the Rules of Racing to maintain accurate and up-to-date treatment records, which may be inspected by RIB Stewards during routine stable inspections.

Where a horse has been treated with a sedative, it is the responsibility of the trainer to ensure that any rider, whether a jockey or exercise rider, is informed of the treatment prior to mounting. This disclosure is essential to enable the rider to make an informed decision and to take appropriate precautions to manage the horse safely.

Failure to communicate this information may constitute a breach of workplace health and safety obligations under New Zealand law, including the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015, which requires trainers and other duty-holders to take all reasonably practicable steps to ensure the health and safety of workers and others affected by their activities.

This guidance is to be considered alongside the requirements of the one clear day rule and trainers are to ensure their runners are presented at all events (race, trial, jump out) free of any prohibited substances.