

# HISA EQUINE HEALTH ADVISORY

**Date:** April 21, 2025

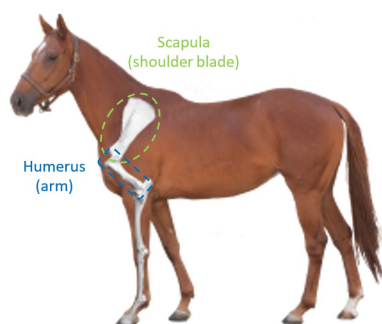
**Re:** Risk Factors and Prevention of Proximal Forelimb (“Shoulder”) Fractures in Thoroughbreds

## What HISA is Doing

To deepen our understanding of why some horses experience proximal forelimb fractures while others do not, HISA is looking closely at exercise history data.

## Identified Risk Area

In 2024, regulatory veterinarians reported 40 fatal humeral and scapular fractures to HISA, accounting for approximately 15% of training fatalities from Covered Racetracks.



## Background

Fatal proximal forelimb (“shoulder”) fractures typically occur in horses that have a stress fracture in the humerus or scapula. These fractures are most likely to occur:

- 1) *in horses just beginning training, or*
- 2) *in horses returning to training following a layup.*

Other horses with irregular racing schedules may also be affected. This risk pattern is different from that of condylar fractures (“lower leg”) and sesamoid fetlock fractures (“ankle”), which typically occur in horses that are in more advanced stages of training and racing.

## Key Findings

- **More than 40% of horses with fatal proximal forelimb fractures reported to HISA had no recorded high-speed furlongs within the 60 days prior to the fracture occurring.**

- On average, horses with these fractures logged only 12.3 high-speed furlongs in the 60 days prior to injury.
- Horses with humeral fractures (a specific type of proximal forelimb fracture) averaged only 5.9 high-speed furlongs in that same timeframe.

**This data suggests that a lack of high-speed exercise, such as in horses just starting training or returning from an extended layoff, may pose a significant risk for fatal proximal forelimb fractures.**

### Recommendations

- **Trainers** should be cautious when bringing horses into training, especially if they exhibit acute forelimb lameness following exercise - even if that lameness resolves in a short period of time. Call your attending veterinarian if you or your exercise riders observe forelimb lameness in a horse in this stage of training.
- **Attending veterinarians** should include humeral or scapular stress fractures in their list of differential diagnoses when evaluating horses beginning or returning to training after a layoff. Palpation, physical examination (including shoulder and elbow flexion, extension, etc.), ultrasound, radiography and bone scan can be helpful for diagnosing humeral or scapular stress fractures.

Please note, as part of HISA's ongoing effort to learn more about why some horses experience proximal forelimb fractures while others do not, trainers may be contacted to complete a brief survey to request additional information about conditioning and rehabilitation regimens prior to a horse arriving or returning to the racetrack.

As HISA continues to collect and analyze exercise history data from across the country, it will issue additional advisories on other injury risk patterns as needed. This effort reflects HISA's broader mission to proactively utilize data in the HISA Portal to identify risk factors and help industry participants make racing safer for both horses and riders.

For more information on **humeral** fractures, please [click here](#).

For more information on **scapular** fractures, please [click here](#).

For a continuing education module approved by HISA for credit, please [click here](#).