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# HORSE SAFETY GUIDELINES

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# HORSE SAFETY GUIDELINES



## INTRODUCTION

The natural affinity of youth for horses has propelled the horse into a significant role in youth development programs. The effectiveness of the horse as the focal point for youthful interests is shown in the 400-percent increase—50,000 to 250,000—in 4-H horse project enrollment in the past decade. Other youth programs using horses have had similar growth.

All major national organizations concerned with horses have dramatically expanded their programs to serve this growing interest. Many youth participate in programs sponsored by two or more groups, and therefore are subject to decisions of more than one group. Because of the growing number of young people in two or more groups, a need for coordination developed.

Concerned organizations met this need through the formation of the National Horse and Pony Youth Activities Council in 1968. A major effort of the Council has been to increase knowledge and use of safe practices in handling and riding horses. The Council in cooperation with Extension Service-USDA and the National Safety Council developed this set of guidelines to promote safe use of the horse.

These guidelines are not intended as complete “how-to-do” instructions, but to provide facts to refresh each rider’s memory on safety and guide him to safe and enjoyable experiences with horses.

Dixon D. Hubbard  
Animal Scientist  
Extension Service-USDA



## **TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR HORSE SAFETY**

- 1. Buy or ride a safe horse.**
- 2. Don't be overmounted.**  
**(Too spirited or too large a horse.)**
- 3. Know your horse.**
- 4. Don't surprise your horse.**
- 5. Check your tack.**
- 6. Small children must be watched around horses.**
- 7. Tie your horse with care.**
- 8. Know trailer safety.**
- 9. Don't crowd others.**
- 10. No clowning please.**



## APPROACHING

1. A horse's vision is restricted directly in front and to the rear, but its hearing is acute. Always speak to a horse as you are approaching it. Failure to do so may startle the horse into kicking.
2. Always approach at an angle, never directly from the front or rear. This is possible even in single stalls or other confined areas.
3. Pet a horse by first placing a hand on its shoulder or neck. The touch should be a rubbing action. Don't "dab" at the end of a horse's nose.
4. Always walk around a horse out of kicking range. Never walk under or step over the tie rope.

## HANDLING

1. Your actions around a horse reflect your ability and confidence in handling a horse.



2. While working around horses, stay close to the horse so that if it kicks, you will not receive the full impact. Stay out of kicking range whenever possible. When necessary to go to the opposite side of a horse, move away and go around out of kicking range.
3. Know your horse, his temperament, and reactions. Control your temper at all times, but let the horse know that you are its firm and kind master.
4. Always let a horse know what you intend to do. When picking up the feet, for example, do not grab the foot hurriedly. This will startle the horse and may cause it to kick. Learn the proper way to lift the feet.
5. Learn and use simple methods of restraint.
6. Tying or holding the head is the safest method when working around a horse.
7. Work about a horse from a position as near the shoulder as possible.
8. Never stand directly behind a horse to work with its tail. Stand off to the side, near the point of the buttock, facing to the rear. Grasp the tail and draw it around to you.
9. Be calm, confident, and collected around horses. A nervous handler causes a nervous, unsafe horse.
10. A good horseman will keep his balance at all times. An accidental slip or stumble can result in unintentional injury by the horse.
11. Do not drop grooming tools underfoot while grooming. Place them where they will not cause you to trip and the horse will not step on them.
12. Know the horse's peculiarities. If someone else is riding it, tell him or her what to expect.
13. Teasing a horse may cause it to develop dangerous habits for the rest of its life. If so, your safety is in serious jeopardy.
14. If you must punish a horse, do so only at the instant of its disobedience. If you wait, even for a minute, it will not understand why it is being punished. Punish without anger, lest your punishment be too severe. Never strike a horse about its head.

15. It is not safe to leave a halter on a loose horse. When necessary to do so, it should be checked daily.
  - Some halter materials will shrink, so be certain to check the fit.
  - There is a possibility of the horse's catching a foot in the halter strap.



- A halter might catch on posts or other objects.
16. Wear footgear that will protect your feet from being stepped on and from nails, etc., around the stables and barnyard. Boots are preferable, or hard-toed shoes. Never wear tennis shoes, moccasins, or go barefooted.

## LEADING

1. Make the horse walk beside you when you lead it. Don't let it run ahead or lag behind. A position even with the horse's head or halfway between the horse's head and its shoulder is considered safest.
2. Always turn the horse to the right and walk around it.
3. Use a long lead strap, with the excess strap folded in a figure 8 style in your left hand, when leading. It is customary to lead from the left, or near side, using the right hand

to hold the lead near the halter. Extend your right elbow slightly toward the horse. If the horse makes contact with you, its shoulder will hit your elbow first and move you away from it. Your elbow can also be used in the horse's neck to keep the head and neck straight for control, as well as to prevent the horse from crowding you.

A horse should be trained to be workable from both sides, even for dismounting and mounting.

4. Your horse is larger and stronger than you. If it resists, do not get in front and try to pull.



5. Never wrap the lead strap, halter shank, or reins around your hand, wrist, or body. A knot at the end of the lead shank aids in maintaining a secure grip when needed for control.
6. When leading, tying, or untying a horse, avoid getting your hands or fingers entangled. Use caution to prevent catching a finger in dangerous positions such as halter and bridle hardware, including snaps, bits, rings, and loops.
7. Be extremely cautious when leading a horse through narrow openings, such as a door. Be certain you have firm control and step through first. Step through quickly and get to one side to avoid being crowded.
8. At any time you are dismounted or leading the horse, the stirrup irons on an English saddle should be run up or dressed. Also, be

cautious of the stirrups catching on objects when using a Western saddle.

9. Use judgment when turning a horse loose. It is generally safest to lead completely through the gate or door and turn the horse about, facing the direction from which you have just entered. Then release the lead strap or remove the halter or bridle. Make the horse stand quietly while you rub the sweaty spot on the poll where the crown piece has rested. Avoid letting a horse bolt away from you when released. Good habits prevent accidents.
10. To prevent becoming accidentally entangled, don't use excessively long lead ropes. Watch the coils when using lariats or lounge lines.

## TYING

1. Know and use the proper knots for tying and restraining a horse.
2. Tie your horse far enough away from strange horses so they cannot fight.
3. Always untie the horse before removing the halter.
4. Avoid use of excessively long lead ropes so as to prevent becoming accidentally entangled. When using lariats or lounge lines, watch the coils.
5. Always tie a horse in a place that's safe for it and for you. Use the halter rope—**not the bridle reins**.
6. Tie a safe distance from other horses and from tree limbs or brush where the horse may become entangled.
7. Be certain to tie to something strong and secure to avoid danger of breaking or coming loose if the horse pulls back. Always tie at a level above the horse's withers.

## BRIDLING

1. Protect your head from the horse's head when bridling. Stand in close just behind and to one side (preferably on the left side) of the horse's head. Use caution when handling the horse's ears.



2. Keep control of the horse when bridling by refastening the halter around the neck.
3. Be certain the bridle is adjusted to fit the horse before you ride. Three points to check are the placement of the bit, the adjustment of the curb strap, and the adjustment of the throatlatch.



## SADDLING

1. Check your saddle blanket and all other equipment for foreign objects. Be certain the horse's back and the cinch or girth areas are clean.
2. When using a Western double-rigged saddle, remember to fasten the front cinch first, rear cinch last when saddling. Unfasten the rear cinch first, front cinch last when unsaddling. Be certain that the strap connecting the front and back cinches (along the horse's belly) is secure.



3. Fasten accessory straps (tie-downs, breast collars, martingales, etc.) after the saddle is cinched on. Unfasten them first, before loosening the cinch.

On English equipment, it is sometimes necessary to thread the girth through the martingale loop before the girth is secured.

4. The back cinch should not be so loose that your horse can get a hind leg caught between the cinch and its belly.
5. When saddling, it is safest to keep the off cinches and stirrup secured over the saddle seats and ease them down when the saddle is on. Don't let them swing wide and hit the horse on the off knee or belly—that hurts.
6. Swing the Western saddle into position easily—not suddenly. Dropping the saddle down too quickly or hard may scare the horse. An English saddle is much lighter than a stock saddle. You don't need to, and should not, swing the saddle into position. Lift it and **place** it into position.
7. Pull up slowly to tighten the cinch. Check the cinch three times: a) after saddling; b) after walking a few steps (untracking); and c) after mounting and riding a short distance.

## MOUNTING AND DISMOUNTING

Never mount or dismount a horse in a barn, near fences, trees, or overhanging projections. Side-



stepping and rearing mounts have injured riders who failed to take these precautions.

A horse should stand quietly for mounting and dismounting. To be certain of this, you must have light control of its head through the reins.

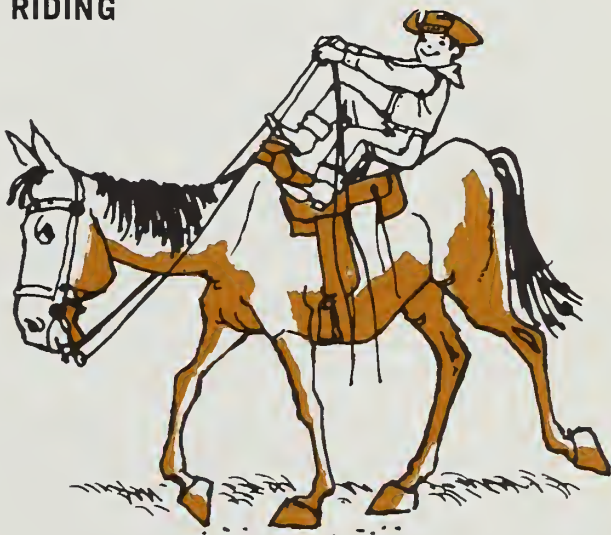
## Using English Equipment

1. Immediately upon dismounting, the rider should “run up” the stirrups. The dangling stirrup may startle or annoy the horse. It is possible for the horse to catch a cheek of the bit or even a hind foot in a dangling stirrup iron when he is fighting flies. The dangling stirrup can also catch on doorways and other projections while you are leading the horse.
2. After running up the stirrups, immediately bring the reins forward over the horse's head. In this position they can be used for leading.

## Using Western Equipment

1. Closed reins or a romal should be brought forward over the horse's head after dismounting.

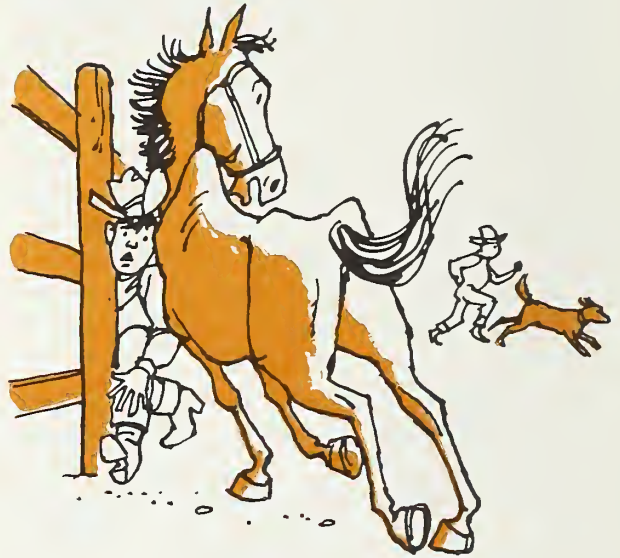
## RIDING



1. Keep your horse under control and maintain a secure seat at all times. Horses are easily frightened by unusual objects and noises.
2. Until you know your horse, confine your riding to an arena or other enclosed area. Ride in open spaces or unconfined areas only after you are familiar with your horse.

3. If your horse becomes frightened, remain calm, speak to it quietly, steady it, and give it time to overcome its fear. Then ride or lead the horse past the obstacle.
4. Hold your mount to a walk when going up or down a hill.
5. Allow a horse to pick his way at a walk when riding on rough ground, or in sand, mud, ice, or snow where there is danger of slipping or falling.
6. Don't fool around. Horseplay is dangerous to you and to your friends, as well as to others who may be nearby.
7. Riding on roads:
  - Be cautious if you ride bareback.
  - Always bridle the horse—riding with just a halter doesn't give control.
  - Use judgment when riding in pairs or in groups. Be certain there is sufficient space.
  - Try to avoid paved or other hard-surfaced roads. Walk the horse when crossing such roads.
  - In areas of heavy traffic, it is safest to dismount and lead across.
  - Ride on the shoulders or in ditches, but **watch for junk**.
  - If necessary to ride on roads or highways, ride on the side required by law. State laws vary as to which side of the road you should ride on. Wear light-colored clothing and carry a flashlight and reflectors when riding at night. Check your State regulations for details.
8. Never rush past riders who are proceeding at a slower gait, as it startles both horses and riders, and often causes accidents. Instead, approach slowly, indicate a desire to pass, and proceed cautiously on the left side.
9. Never ride off until all riders in your group are mounted.
10. Ride abreast or stay a **full horse's length** from the horse in front to avoid the possibility of your being kicked, or the horse's being kicked.

11. Walk your horse when approaching and going through underpasses and over bridges.
12. When your horse is full of energy, exercise it on a lounge line or ride it in an enclosed area until it is settled.
13. Don't let a horse run to and from the stables. Walk the horse the last mile home.
14. Know proper use and the purpose of spurs before wearing them.



15. Dogs and horses are not always good companions. Keep your dog under control at all times around horses.
16. Wear protective headgear appropriate to the activity in which you are engaged, especially in **any** form of jumping.

## RIDING AT NIGHT

1. Riding at night can be a pleasure, but must be recognized as being more hazardous than daytime riding. Walk the horse; fast gaits are dangerous.
2. If necessary to ride at night on roads or highways, ride on the side required by law. State laws vary in regard to which side of the road you should ride. Wear light-colored clothing and carry a flashlight and reflectors. Check your State regulations for details.

3. Select a location with care. Choose controlled bridle paths or familiar, safe open areas.



## EQUIPMENT AND CLOTHING

1. Learn to handle a rope before carrying one on a horse. Always use caution when working with a rope if the horse is not “rope-broke.” Never tie the rope “hard and fast” to a saddle horn while roping from a green horse.



2. Bridle reins, stirrup leathers, headstalls, curbstraps, and cinch straps should be kept in the best possible condition; your safety depends on these straps. Replace any of the straps when they begin to show signs of wear (cracking or checking).

3. Be sure all tack fits the horse. Adjust your tie-downs, etc., to a safe length that will not hinder the horse's balance.
4. Spurs can trip you when working on the ground. Take them off when not mounted.
5. Wear neat, well-fitted clothing that will not snag on equipment. Belts, jackets, and front chap straps can become hooked over the saddle horn.
6. Wear boots or shoes with heels to keep your foot from slipping through the stirrup.
7. Keep the horse's feet properly trimmed and/or shod.
8. Infectious organisms are prevalent around barns, corrals, and fences. **Gloves are a safeguard** against cuts, scratches, splinters, and rope burns.

## TRAILERING OR OTHER HAULING

1. Loading a horse on a trailer should be done by two persons if at all possible.
2. Always stand to one side, never directly behind, when loading or unloading a horse from a trailer or truck.
3. The circumstances of loading a horse vary, but the following methods are given in order of preference:
  - a. Train the horse so it can be sent into the trailer.
  - b. In a two-horse trailer lead the horse into the left side while you stand on the right side of the center divider, or vice versa.
  - c. It is least desirable to get in front and lead the horse in. Never do this without an escape door or front exit. Even with a door, use caution—most are awkward to get through, and also, horses have been known to follow the handler out.
4. Be certain the ground area behind and around the truck or trailer affords safe footing before loading or unloading.
5. It is safest to remove all equipment (bridles, saddle, etc.) before loading. Use your halter.



6. Always speak to a horse in a truck or trailer before attempting to handle it.
7. If you have trouble loading or unloading, get experienced help.
8. Secure the butt bar or chain before tying the horse. Use care when reaching for it. Ease it down when you unfasten it to avoid bumping the horse's legs.
9. In unloading, always untie a horse before opening the gate or door.
10. Avoid slick trailer floors. Use matting or some type of bedding for secure footing.
11. Check your trailer regularly for:
  - Rotting or weakened floor boards.
  - Rusted and weakened door hinges.
  - Broken hitch welds.
  - Worn or broken spring shackles and wheel bearings. Have a competent mechanic check these when the trailer is serviced.
12. Make sure the trailer is properly constructed. You may need to ask an expert about this.
13. Be certain the trailer meets State requirements for brakes and lights.
14. The trailer should be high enough to give a horse ample neck and head room. Remove or cover any protruding objects.
15. When driving always:
  - Double check all connections (lights, brakes, hitch, and safety chains).
  - Be certain all doors are closed and secured.

- Drive carefully. Make turns slowly. Start and stop slowly and steadily.
  - Look far ahead to avoid emergencies. Drive in a defensive manner.
16. It is safer when hauling a stallion with other horses to load the stallion first and to unload it last.
  17. Distribute the weight of the load evenly. When hauling one horse, it is considered safest to load it on the left side of the trailer.
  18. Never throw lighted cigarettes or matches from a car or truck window. You might start a fire in the area or the wind might suck them into the trailer.
  19. Check the horse and trailer hitch at every stop.
  20. Opinions vary on hauling a horse tied or loose. If you tie, allow sufficient length of rope so the horse can move its head for balance. Use a safety release or a quick-release knot.
  21. If hauling in a truck or other open carrier, you should protect the horse's eyes from wind and foreign objects. Use goggles or some type of wind shield.
  22. Horses are like people—some get sick from motion. Adjust the feeding schedule to avoid travelling when the horse is full of feed and water. Feed smaller amounts more often if necessary.

## TRAIL RIDING

1. If you plan to ride alone, tell someone where you are going and about when you expect to return.
2. Ride a well-mannered horse.
3. Do not play practical jokes and indulge in horseplay.
4. Watch where you ride—avoid dangerous ground. Note landmarks. Study the country and view behind you so you will know how it looks.
5. Courtesy is the best safety on the trail.
6. Think of your horse first. Watch its condition, avoid injuries, and care for it properly.

7. Carry a good pocket knife to cut ropes, etc., in case of entanglement.
  8. Don't tie the reins together.
  9. Ride balanced and erect to avoid tiring the horse or creating sore backs, legs, etc.
  10. Check the equipment:
    - Have a halter and rope. Hobbles are fine if the horse is trained to them.
    - Have clean saddle blankets or pads.
    - Be certain the equipment is in good repair and fits the horse.
    - Include bad-weather clothing.
    - A pair of wire cutters is handy in case the horse becomes entangled in wire.
    - A lariat is handy for many needs, but **know how to use one** and be certain the horse is accustomed to a rope.
    - Extras should include pieces of leather or rawhide for repairs; a few spare horseshoe nails; and a few matches.
  11. If you unsaddle, store your gear properly and place the saddle blanket where it will dry. Keep your gear covered overnight.
  12. Don't water your horse when it is hot. Cool it first.
  13. Always tie a horse in a safe place. Use the halter rope—not the bridle reins.
14. Be extremely cautious of cigarettes, matches, and fires. Know they are out before discarding them or leaving.
  15. Obtain current, accurate maps and information on the area. Become familiar with the terrain and climate.
  16. If you ride on Federal or State lands, seek advice from the forest or park officials. Know their regulations on use of the trails and fire.
  17. Be certain the horse is in good physical condition and its hooves and shoes are ready for the trail.
  18. Use extreme caution at wet spots or boggy places.
  19. Speed on the trail is unsafe. Ride at safe gaits.
  20. Avoid overhanging limbs. Warn the rider behind you if you encounter one. Watch the rider ahead so a limb pushed aside doesn't snap back and slap your horse in the face.



## NATIONAL HORSE AND PONY YOUTH ACTIVITIES COUNCIL

The members of the National Horse and Pony Youth Activities Council are people with an active and sincere interest in horses and youth. They hold positions with major national horsemen's organizations or with the Cooperative Extension Service. Members of the council are:

### ORGANIZATIONS

American Association of Sheriff Posses  
and Riding Clubs  
American Horse Council, Inc.  
American Horse Shows Association  
American Morgan Horse Association, Inc.  
American Paint Horse Association  
American Quarter Horse Association  
American Saddle Horse Breeders' Association  
American Shetland Pony Club  
Appaloosa Horse Club, Inc.  
Division of Girls' and Women's Sports—DMA—  
National Riding Committee of the American  
Association of Health, Physical Education, and  
Recreation  
Equestrian Trails, Inc.  
International Arabian Horse Association  
National Junior Horsemastership  
North American Trail Ride Conference  
Pinto Horse Association of America, Inc.  
Pony of the Americas Club, Inc.  
United States Pony Clubs  
Welsh Pony Society of America, Inc.

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*The role of the Council is advisory and the adoption of Council recommendations by member associations is strictly voluntary.*

No preference for or discrimination against any individual breed of horse or organization is intended by the Council.

Cooperative Extension Work: United States Department of Agriculture and State Land-Grant Universities Cooperating.

# FIRE SAFETY

**30 SECONDS  
IS ALL  
YOUR HORSE  
MAY HAVE**



## PLAN NOW

1. Know where fire alarms are located.
2. Know where fire equipment is.
3. Know where water is.
4. Know how to use fire equipment.

**POST YOUR FIRE DEPARTMENT NUMBER  
IN A PROMINENT PLACE**

## ACTION IN CASE OF FIRE

1. Call the fire department.
2. Begin evacuating horses.
3. Open all outside access gates to the stable area.
4. Keep roads clear for fire equipment access.
5. Use first aid fire fighting equipment (hand extinguishers, buckets, etc.).
6. Meet the fire department apparatus and direct it to the fire.