

RUTGERS COOPERATIVE RESEARCH AND EXTENSION

OF ATLANTIC COUNTY

The Basics of Horseback Riding Safety

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Wear a Helmet

If you don't know the effects of Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), you owe it to yourself to read up on it. Besides taking your life, a serious blow to the head can have devastating effects, such as the loss of your job, your academic talent, your memory and your dignity. Always be sure your helmet is ASTM/SEI approved! Riding helmets made to the ASTM F1163 standard and certified by the Safety Equipment Institute (SEI) are considered to be the world's best head protection for horseback riders.

Keep Your Boots On!

A boot with a good heel is a must to keep your foot from slipping through the stirrups. Rodeo riders in sports where falling off and being dragged are likely incidents tend to buy boots that are on the large side so their foot will slip out easily. Numerous injuries are related to being caught in the stirrup and dragged by the horse. A properly matched boot-stirrup combination is very important. Release catches are available on some saddles to prevent dragging if your foot is caught in the stirrup.

Wear Bright Colored Clothing

Brightly colored clothing, or better yet, an orange safety vest or pinney, lets people see you coming. If you enjoy riding in the woods, this is especially helpful during hunting season.

Body-protecting gear, such as the Kevlar[®] Body Protector, can be used to prevent soft tissue injuries and rib fractures; however, it does not protect the spine from injury and does not protect against a massive crushing blow to the chest.

Riders should wear properly fitted boots and nonskid gloves. Do not wear loose-fitting or baggy clothing. All riding equipment should be maintained and inspected thoroughly before venturing out.

Tack Safety

Make sure your tack is in excellent condition. You'll probably crash and burn if a rein snaps in the middle of a jump. Keep leather supple and protected from moisture.

Stay Alert When Riding

Strive to stay alert and attentive at all times when riding or working with your horse. Be aware of the environment, the horse's behavior and your own responses. If you're tired or if your perception is otherwise impaired, please do not ride or work your horse.

Dogs and Kids

As much as possible, keep dogs and small children away from your horse. Biting, yapping, nipping, lunging and chasing are all things that dogs love to do when they play with other dogs. This type of behavior cannot be tolerated around horses. Horses, dogs and even people have been known to

get hurt when a horse is startled by the antics of dogs at play.

Small children must be watched carefully. They do not realize that their fingers could be nipped or their toes stepped on if they aren't careful. Likewise, plopping a baby alone on a saddle for a photo is rarely a good idea.

Riding the Roads

When riding on roads, face the traffic on the left of the roadway – in other words, ride in the same direction the cars are going. In New Jersey, a new law helps drivers, riders, and horses use the roads together more safely.

All vehicles must slow down to a speed not over 25 mph and proceed with caution. In addition, if the rider signals, through the use of a raised hand or other object, a car coming in the opposite direction must come to a complete stop and stay at a stop until the horse and rider pass. Any violation of this law can result in a \$150 fine.

Other New Jersey Motor Vehicle Laws Regarding Horses and Horse-Drawn Vehicles

39:4-72. Motor vehicles in the vicinity of a horse

When approaching or passing a person riding or driving a horse, a person driving a motor vehicle shall reduce the vehicle's speed to a rate not exceeding 25 miles per hour and proceed with caution. At the request of or upon a signal by putting up the hand or otherwise, from a person riding or driving a horse in the opposite direction, the motor vehicle driver shall stop the motor vehicle and remain stationary as long as necessary to allow the horse to pass.

39:4-15. Sleigh bells on horses attached to a sleigh

No person shall drive a horse attached to a sleigh or sled on a highway unless there are a sufficient number of bells attached to the horse's harness to give warning of its approach.

39:4-16. Unattended horses; precautions used

No horse shall be left unattended in a highway unless securely fastened or unless the wheels of the vehicle to which he is harnessed are securely tied, fastened or chained, and the vehicle is of sufficient weight to prevent its being dragged at a dangerous speed with the wheels so secured.

39:4-17. Unbitted horses

No horse shall be unbitted in a highway unless secured by a halter.

39:4-21. Racing on highway prohibited; exception

No person shall run or race a horse on a highway, whether the running, racing or trotting is for trial of speed or for the purpose of passing another horse or vehicle. This section shall not apply where permission for racing is given by the proper municipal authorities and the portion of the highway which is devoted to the racing is properly closed to other traffic.

Resources

HorseCentric. (2004). Horseback Riding (On-line). Available: www.horsecentric.com

Malavese, Dru (2001). Helmet Safety. American Medical Equestrian Association/ Safe Riders Foundation. Albuquerque, NM

New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission. (2004). New Jersey Driver Manual (MVC Publication). Trenton, NJ: State of New Jersey .

Traffic Regulation: Horses and Horse Drawn Vehicles, S.1247. §2-C.39:3.41.