



## Road Safety for Equestrians

Many different user groups, including horseback riders, share Ontario's roadways. While Ontario Equestrian urges riders to stay off roadways wherever possible, we realize that it's not always possible for riders to avoid roads altogether. Sometimes riders must cross roadways that intersect trail systems or they have to ride along a roadway to access an adjoining property.

If riders must ride along roadways, Ontario Equestrian strongly recommends riding single file on the shoulder of the road in the direction of traffic to reduce the risk of horses spooking at oncoming vehicles. Riders must also obey all traffic signs and should indicate their intent to cross, turn or stop. When crossing a roadway, head straight across and make sure you are in an area where it's possible to see any potential oncoming vehicles. Groups of horses crossing the road should do so all at once.

Horses that spook easily or are excitable should never be ridden on roads.

To further decrease the risk of a collision with a motor vehicle, riders need to ensure both they and their horses are visible to motorists. They should be outfitted in bright, reflective clothing and equipment. However, riders are urged to stay off roadways after dusk and before dawn when visibility is low.

Horses pulling buggies are classified as a slow moving vehicle and, as such, require a slow moving vehicle sign affixed to the rear of the cart.

Ironically, many riders overlook the most obvious way to stay safe while out riding. Proper footwear and a certified helmet are critical pieces of the safety puzzle, yet many riders don't wear them and aren't getting the message that accidents can happen at any time to anyone, regardless of age, discipline or riding experience.

Under the Highway Safety Act, no person under the age of 18 can be mounted on a horse on a highway unless they are wearing a certified helmet and hard soled footwear with a heel of no less than 1.5 centimeters. In addition, no parent or guardian of a person under the age of 16 years of age can knowingly permit that child to ride a horse on a highway without meeting those requirements. Even if you are old enough to be exempt from the law, keep in mind that something as simple as your horse stumbling could result in you falling off and sustaining a traumatic brain injury.

Just as equestrians have a responsibility to keep our roadways safe, so too do motorists. According to the Highway Traffic Act, "Every person having the control or charge of a motor vehicle or motor assisted bicycle on a highway, when approaching a horse or other animal that is drawing a vehicle or being driven, led or ridden, shall operate, manage and control the motor vehicle or motor assisted bicycle so as to exercise every reasonable precaution to prevent the frightening of the horse or other animal and to ensure the safety and protection of any person driving, leading or riding upon the horse or other animal or being in any vehicle drawn by the horse or other animal. R.S.O. 1990, c. H.8, s. 167."

Motorists should always err on the side of caution when passing a horse and need to recognize that horses are unpredictable animals that have a mind of their own. With that in mind, slow down and give horses ample room when passing them, if it's safe to do so. If a rider is having trouble controlling their horse, stop your vehicle in a safe location until the rider has resumed control. Never honk your horn to "warn" a rider that you are approaching because it could frighten their horse.

The take home message is to enjoy your horse, but to take every possible safety precaution to minimize your risk, particularly when hacking along roadways. Stay safe and happy riding!