



Manitoba
Horse Council



Road Safety Handbook for Equestrians

In this booklet, wherever "horse rider" appears, it implies "carriage driver" unless otherwise stated.



Road Sense

With increased development in rural areas and the reduction of off-road trails, motorists are more likely than ever to encounter a horse rider on the roadway.

According to Manitoba's Highway Traffic Act, horse riders and drivers of horse-drawn carriages have the same right to use the road and must follow the same rules.

It is the responsibility of both the rider and passing motorists to help share the road safely. While riders seek proper training for themselves and their horses to ride with traffic, it's also up to drivers to obey the law and take precautions.

Riders are probably aware that the average motorist is not familiar with horses and may not understand that they can be unpredictable and easily startled, so it is up to them to make their ride out as safe as possible.

THE RIGHT TO USE THE ROAD

In the Manitoba Highway Traffic Act several sections apply directly or indirectly to equestrians.

Rights and duties of riders

A person riding an animal or driving an animal-drawn vehicle upon a highway has all the rights and is subject to the duties of a vehicle under this part of the Act.

When riding or driving, you must travel on the road, in the direction of traffic, and not on the sidewalk. When you lead your horse you become a pedestrian and are required to use a sidewalk if available and passable, otherwise you may walk on the left-hand edge of the roadway or on the shoulder as the case may be.

Keep to the right

Although riders have the same rights as a vehicle to use the road, a rider must keep to the extreme right-hand lane where the roadway has two or more lanes, or as close as possible to the edge or curb of the roadway.

Carriage Drivers

The Act is quite wordy on this but in plain words, carriage drivers need an operating flashing amber light at the rear of the carriage, or a reflecting triangle.

Road or shoulder?

The shoulder of the roadway is not specified as an allowable route for riders/drivers in any regulation and is only referred to as an option for pedestrians if there is no sidewalk, or as a temporary place for drivers to stop.

When you ride on the shoulder of a highway, you are signaling to motorists that you are yielding the road (as in the case when a motorist pulls their vehicle over to the right to show that the other traffic may pass).

However if a rider is having difficulty, or has an inexperienced or unsure horse, legally they may remain on the roadway showing their possession of the right-of-way in the right hand lane. This encourages vehicles to pass in the left hand traffic lane when safe to do so.

If you have to ride on the shoulder, stay as far away from the traffic as possible.

ROAD SENSE FOR RIDERS AND DRIVERS

Be safe – Be seen – Be aware

KNOW YOUR HORSE

Be Safe

Before venturing out, ask yourself, “Am I ready? Am I a competent rider, confident and capable of controlling my horse if there’s a problem on the road?”

Is your horse reliable and road ready? Has he been desensitized to the noise and movement of traffic? If not, invest in his training: find the time, the trainer, or the clinic to help prepare you both for road readiness. Knowing how to control a horse when it is upset is critical to safety.

Warm up! Lunge or ride your horse at home or in a safe area at a walk, trot or lope before heading out on the road. Let him release any pent up energy in a safe, non-spooky way.

Select the safest route. Some roads can be dangerous to ride on due to shoulder width, traffic speed, or amount of traffic. Make sure to choose the route with the widest shoulder, the lowest speed limit and the least amount of traffic possible.

Obey all traffic signs and signals. Ride on the right hand side of the road (with traffic) and yield to pedestrians. If you ride with a partner, keep one horse length between you and the horse in front.

Don’t take a young or inexperienced horse out without an experienced horse and rider.

If riding in a group, ride single file and let the most visible and experienced person ride closest to the approaching traffic.

When crossing a roadway, select a safe spot to cross. View every bend in the road, intersection, crest of a hill, or construction zone as a hazard. Choose roads with a wide shoulder or other avenue for escape if the need arises. Choose an area to cross where approaching cars are easily seen and heard. Dismount and lead your horse if you are unsure of your safety.

Be Seen

Be visible: wear bright colours during the day, a reflective vest if possible, and definitely a reflective vest at dusk and dawn.

Dress your horse with reflective leg wraps, brow bands, breast collars and stirrup bars.

If you will be out after dark attach a flashing LED safety light at the front of the helmet and a red light at the back, as well as reflective tack.

Carriage drivers out at night must carry a front white light and a rear red light to conform with the HighwayTraffic Act.

Be Aware

Be aware of different road surfaces.

Asphalt roads can be slippery especially when wet. Gravel roads with large stones can cause pain for tender-footed horses, making them anxious or unwilling to go forward. Loose gravel may cause your horse to slip and stumble. If you are often on the road, your horse may need shoes or protective boots.

Watch for broken glass along your chosen route. It may be hidden by tall grass. Watch also for soft shoulder areas that may be unsafe for a horse to walk on. Unfamiliar objects like shiny aluminum cans or blowing plastic

bags can frighten a horse enough to cause it to spook into the road. Be ready for a spook, but don't be nervous, as your nervousness will be transmitted to your horse.

Watch for animals along the route: barking dogs that may suddenly dart out, cows, pigs, llamas or other farm animals that your horse is not accustomed to. Even another horse behind a fence, especially one that is running, can frighten your horse.

Loose dogs will often chase horses. Walk - never run - past a yard with a loose dog. Your best strategy is to turn your horse to face it and firmly tell the dog to "stay" or "go home". Glance back to see if the dog is safely staying in the yard, but looking back too often may encourage the dog to follow.

People can be unpredictable; no matter how well educated, there will always be individuals who act irresponsibly. Uneducated motorists may pass too closely, so riders and carriage drivers have to be prepared for those vehicle drivers who truly don't know any better.

Cyclists can be particularly frightening because bicycles approach silently and the rider is often hunched over the handlebars, appearing to the horse as a predator. If you are aware of a cyclist approaching, ask them to speak to you. Hearing the human

voice from the “predator” will help ease your horse’s fear.

Know your horse

Horses can be unpredictable: by nature they are flight animals. A horse may spook and bolt with no warning, so before you take to the road, be sure you know and trust your horse.

A nervous or fresh horse may be more difficult to handle away from familiar surroundings. Keep light rein contact at all times: you will be ready to respond to emergencies, and your horse will gain confidence from your guidance.

If you tense up when a vehicle passes, your nervousness may be transmitted to your horse: relax, stay calm, cool and centered for your horse’s benefit.



Learn to recognize your horse’s pre-spook signs. Before a spook, often a horse’s ears will prick sharply forward, its head will go up, and its neck will tense. It may snort or blow, or start to breathe faster, or it may hesitate, start to veer away, or try to turn around. This is the time to stop and take control of your horse.

ROAD TIPS

If you feel unsafe in the saddle, find a safe place to dismount and hand walk your horse, but remember that if you’re on the ground, a frightened horse might jump right into you, stepping on you or knocking you down.

If you can get off the road into a driveway or farther onto the shoulder when a vehicle goes by, do so. There is no shame in ducking into a driveway long enough to let that gravel truck speed past.

If you are nervous, you may frighten your horse even more, so in that case it may be safer to hand walk your horse/carriage until you reach a point where you feel safe to remount. Whenever safe, lead your horse so that it is on your side farthest away from traffic. This at least allows you to push your horse’s hind or forequarters out of the way should it start to spook.

Most experienced equestrians say that if your horse is frightened,

you are usually safer in the saddle or carriage than on the ground.

If you encounter a situation where your horse is frightened and difficult to control try to remember the following:

Stay calm. Panicking, yelling, or running will only serve to elevate his anxiety; chances are, if you are stressed, this will be picked up by your horse.

Take a deep breath and let it out slowly so he can feel you relax.

Let him move his feet. A horse's natural instinct when frightened is to flee. His anxiety will be reduced if you allow him to turn in small circles if there is room, or move his hindquarters over one way and then another, back up, or step forward when safe. Training your horse to step over his hind feet (disengaging the hindquarters) on cue is crucial to trail and road safety – it is like knowing how to take your car out of drive.

Let him check out the threat in his own time. If he is frightened of something that is in reality non-threatening, like a mailbox or a culvert, the first step is to allow him to see that what seems scary is really no threat. Turn to face the problem, and let your horse step forward and investigate in its own time, urging it forward gently one step at a time, or not at all. This is a confidence builder for the future. (On future rides, take every

opportunity to “meet and greet” possible threats.)

If it's not a safe place to let your horse face the scary object, move calmly as far away from the threat as you safely can.

In an emergency take to the ditch to get out of the way of a potentially dangerous driver - better to get dirty than to get hurt.

In cases where there are problems with a horse it may be better to ride on the road to avoid getting caught between the road and the ditch. The rider will then have more space to regain control of the mount. This, of course, depends on the traffic flow and speed.

Never RUN from a dangerous situation. Running releases adrenalin, which in turn causes your horse to become even more excited. Turn and face what is frightening your horse, allowing it to move its feet if it needs to, or move away as calmly and slowly as possible.

If you encounter a motorist who poses a danger to horse and rider try to get a license plate number and description. Report it to police when you return to the barn. The more riders report unsafe driving, the more aware the authorities will be that a problem exists.

If you carry a cell phone, keep it in your pocket, not on

your saddle. Make sure you have identification, a hoof pick, and a pocket knife with you. Tell someone where you will be riding and when you expect to return, and whenever possible, ride with a buddy.

BEFORE YOU RIDE

Training – All riders need to ensure that their horse has been exposed to a variety of obstacles and sounds, has good manners, and is easily controlled under saddle before venturing out.

Supervision – Young and inexperienced riders should always be accompanied by adult, experienced riders when riding on or near the road.

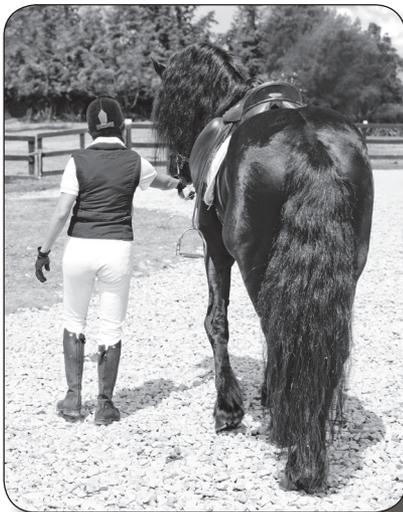
Helmets – Whether you ride in an English or a Western saddle or drive a coach or carriage, a

protective helmet that fits properly should be worn when riding/driving horses on the road. It is the responsibility of the parent, guardian or horse owner to ensure that a child is wearing an approved, snug fitting helmet.

In the winter it is not safe to put a woollen tuque UNDER the helmet. That practice contradicts the design and concussion-absorbing fit of the helmet. Thin under-helmet balaclavas and tuques can be purchased from most tack, motorcycle or snowmobile accessory stores.

Footwear – Ensure that you wear appropriate footwear: a boot or shoe with a pronounced heel that will not slip easily through the stirrup to help prevent a foot being hung up in the stirrup (with the potential for being dragged by a frightened horse). Stirrups should be approximately 1” wider than the boot or shoe to allow the foot to slide out of the stirrup quickly and easily in an emergency, but not so wide that the foot can slip through and become caught.

Visibility – Don't ride on the road in poor visibility conditions or at nightfall if you can help it. All riders should wear some form of high visibility garment when riding on the road; if there is a potential to be caught out after dark, ensure that you have packed appropriate lights.



SHARING THE ROAD

Hand signals

As a rider, you must follow the basic laws of the road, including yielding, stopping at stop signs, and signaling for turns and stops.

The same hand signals used by cyclists are used by equestrians. You may extend either arm straight from the shoulder and point in the direction of your turn.

Be sure to shoulder-check before you stop, slow down or change direction – just as you would if driving a car.

In spite of hand signals, motorists are often unaware that horses are unpredictable. In fact, a rider on a young or frightened horse may have their hands too full keeping the animal under control to be able to signal.

Friendly wave: a courtesy gesture that should be extended to motorists when they pass safely, exercising caution. If your hands are not free then a friendly smile or nod is the least you can do.

Please slow down: Arm extended with open palm, and gesturing with a slow pumping action. This signal is used to advise motorists that they need to slow down when approaching and attempting to pass the horse.



Left turn



Please stop



Please slow down

Don't overuse this signal. If a motorist is already slowing down, a thank you wave is the best way to encourage and reward their courtesy. Use the slow down signal only if someone is approaching too fast, or if a horse is acting up.

Please stop: Arm extended to front, hand up with open palm. This gesture is made to get the attention of the motorist quickly and ask them to stop when the horse is frightened.

If a motorist is displaying apparent dangerous behaviour please refrain from rude gestures or shouting. It is poor etiquette and can lead to an altercation between rider and motorist. Shouting may also startle the horse(s) and make them think they have done something wrong. Regardless of the motorists' actions, please stay calm.

Liability

If you cause an accident you can be liable, so take all the right precautions. Respect the laws, obey signage, ensure that you and your horse are highly visible and have had sufficient training to be safe on the roads.

Get insurance. Members of Manitoba Horse Council receive third-party liability insurance (up to \$5,000,000) as part of their membership. This covers members in cases where a horse owner/user is sued for damages caused by a horse they are riding/driving.



This car hit a horse

TIPS FOR RIDERS IN A GROUP



Ride in a single file with seven horses at the most. If there are more than seven horses, divide into groups separated by approximately 100 metres. Keep one horse length (2m) between each horse.

Approach a crossing place in single file with the most experienced rider, horse or carriage driver in the lead and the second most experienced in the rear.

Wait until everyone is ready and cross as a unit. Riders should stop in a line along the road and wait for the person in charge to give the signal to cross. Do not go one at a time as it can take too long and the party may get separated.

Before crossing the road:

Get your horse's focus and full attention. Be aware of everything going on around you.

Look left and right for oncoming traffic. Be aware behind and in front for potential hazards.

Assess the footing and evaluate the surrounds to determine if this is a good location to cross.

Listen for approaching vehicles. Engine sounds give you clues as to the type of vehicle and the speed it is travelling. Pay attention to where your horse is listening. They may hear something you cannot.

Wait for a long break in traffic, or for the traffic to be stopped before you cross.

If your horse is anxious you may need to let it walk in small circles, or have it move its feet a little, forward-back-sideways, to reduce its anxiety.

Crossing the road:

Signal and look before turning

Cross abreast, but staying as close together as is safe.

Maintain safe crossing formation

When all have crossed, resume the correct formation with one horse length between each horse.

Do!

- Respect private property and “No Trespassing” signs.
- Respect field crops
- Leave gates the way you found them: open if they were open, closed behind you if you have to open them to pass through.
- Make sure you have full tack in good condition and that bridles, reins and cinches (or girths) are properly and securely fastened.
- Carry a cell phone in your pocket or a fanny pack.
- Put your best contact number in your phone with ICE in front of the name (In Case of Emergency). First responders know to look for this number if you cannot do it for yourself.
- Carry a basic safety kit in a fanny pack such as ID, a hoof pick, a pocket knife and some string.
- Ride with a buddy, if possible.
- Leave a note of where you expect to ride and when you plan to return, if you set out on your own.

Don't!

- Ride double or carry something that will affect your balance, or that will interfere with your handling of the reins.
- Ride bareback:
- Pony another horse from the back of your horse unless you are an experienced rider on an experienced horse.
- Ride in a dangerous manner without due care and attention to other road users.
- Use headphones, earphones or a cell phone when riding. These can seriously distract the rider/ carriage driver and cause potential problems.
- Drink and ride or operate a horse-drawn vehicle. Safety first!

SHARE THE ROAD SAFELY

In the companion brochure to this booklet, other road users will be reminded of the following:

Motorists

Follow a few simple steps to share the road safely with horse riders and carriage drivers:

- Slow right down and be prepared to stop when approaching a horse and rider or carriage driver – on either side of the road.
- Do not follow closely and rev your engine if it is not safe to pass.
- When safe to do so, pass wide (at least one car's width) and slowly.
- Do not blow your horn at any time around horses – this can startle the animal and put everyone at risk.
- Accelerate gently when you have passed.
- Allow plenty of distance between yourself and the horse before returning to your lane.
- Prepare to stop and wait if the rider is having trouble controlling the horse.

Other motorised vehicles

The size of your vehicle and the noise of the exhaust can be extremely alarming to a horse, especially if you are off-road. Follow the same rules as other vehicles, but take extra precautions when approaching and passing.

Cyclists

Bicycles can be particularly frightening to horses because there is no noise and the rider is often hunched over the handlebars in a predatory position.

To alleviate these issues, sit up in your seat and talk to the horse rider. If the horse begins to appear nervous, stop and wait until the rider is back in control of the animal.



For more information contact

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www.manitobahorsecouncil.ca*

Highway Traffic Act:

https://web2.gov.mb.ca/laws/statutes/ccsm/_pdf.php?cap=h60

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge and thank

- *Manitoba Public Insurance for providing feedback*
- *Manitoba Driving Society (carriage driving photo)*
- *Teah Wilson, Eragon Rogue Dancer and Linda Hazelwood (hand signal photos)*
- *Stock photos from Dreamstime (cyclists), and Freestock (walking woman)*
- *Helping Hooves (Pam Glover) and Sandy Schmidt (cover photo)*

MOTORISTS - PLEASE

Watch out for horses on the road.

Slow down when approaching.

Pass wide and slow (using the left lane if possible).

Be prepared to stop quickly if necessary.

Don't rev and speed up after you have passed.

Horses are not machines – they will react!

CYCLISTS & PEDESTRIANS

Speak up! Please pass single file and to the outside.

DOG OWNERS

Please keep your dog leashed when horses are around.

One kick could kill your dog.

Don't be the one at fault.



**Manitoba
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Produced by Manitoba Horse Council, the not-for-profit organization representing people involved in equine activity in Manitoba.

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