

# Ride Safe - Essentials When Riding the Trails

There are many considerations to keep in mind as you prepare to hit the trail. Trail riding is a popular way to spend time outdoors enjoying nature, friendship, and your horse. Safety is first and foremost and should always be considered when riding on the trails. There are many considerations to keep in mind as you prepare to hit the trails.

- *Have you checked your tack, equipment, and horse?*
- *Do you have a safety plan?*
- *If you are riding alone, did you tell someone where you were going, and when to expect your return?*

These are a few of the many considerations and steps to take to ensure a safe and enjoyable ride for you and your horse.

## Make a Plan

Plan your ride and route in advance. Make sure the area and trails allow horses. It is best to not ride alone; if you do, let someone know where you are going and when to expect you back. Even if you are riding with a group, it is good practice to let someone know where you are riding and when to expect the group back. Be aware of the wildlife you may encounter in the area and plan accordingly. There are national & state forests, thousands of miles of forestry roads, designated equestrian trails, and shared-use trails open to trail-riding enthusiasts.

# Check your Tack and Equipment

Riding equipment should be clean and in good working condition, free of rot and frays. The saddle should fit you and your horse properly. It should not pinch the horse's withers, shoulders, back, or loin, and the girth should not pinch behind the horse's elbow. Now is also a good time to make sure your stirrups are adjusted properly: the bottom of the stirrup should reach the ankle bone of the rider when the foot is out of the stirrup.

## Other General Guidelines for Riding Safely on the Trail

- Wear a properly fitted riding helmet.
- Stay alert and be aware of your surroundings and watch for other horses acting up or situations that may frighten your horse.
- Always ride at the speed that is comfortable and safe for the least experienced rider in the group.
- Avoid riding away from other horses in the group, especially from a horse that has a buddy.
- Depending on temperament and experience of horses and riders in your group, you may ride abreast (shoulder to shoulder).
- Try to avoid horses that do not like your horse or vice versa.
- Wear bright colors during hunting seasons. A blaze-orange hunting vest is a great idea; some are reversible, so you can wear a softer color other times of the year. Do not forget about your horse; consider a brightly-colored halter, saddle bag, or plastic ribbon braided into their mane and/or tail.

## Items to Consider Packing

- Cell phone
- Health papers/Coggins Test
- Easy Boot *\*Good to have in case your horse has lost a shoe. No Easy Boot? No problem: a diaper, vet wrap and tape can be used.*
- Map, compass, other GPS tracker
- Horse and human First Aid kits
- Electrolytes
- Whistle *\*Less effort to use in an emergency.*
- Snacks
- Sunscreen
- Water
- Halter/lead rope *\*Good to have in case bridle, reins, or bit breaks.*
- Rain gear
- Gloves
- Hoof pick
- Multi-tool

Whether you are taking a short ride or a weekend trip, keep these safety guidelines in mind before you hit the trails. Basic safety procedures and practices are essential in providing a safe and enjoyable experience for you, your riding group, and your horse.

***Happy Trails!***

Pennsylvania 4-H Horse Program-Horsemanship Skills

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