



Basic Safety Around Horses

✓ **The first rule is always Safety First!**

You are dealing with a large animal that lives by the “flight first” rule of survival. If the horse is startled or scared, the horse will try to run away.

✓ **Never approach a horse until he is standing with his head toward you.**

As you approach a stall, speak to the horse, so the horse knows that a person is near and is not startled. A startled horse will want to flee and run away as this is their natural instinct. Do not give a horse a reason to be startled and you will have fewer safety risks. Once you have spoken to the horse, approach quietly but decisively, with no sudden movements. Open the stall door and speak to the horse. The horse should turn and face you. Do not enter until the horse is facing you. Never walk into the stall and approach the rump or you can get caught in the stall with no safe path to the door. If the horse bolts, kicks or tries to run over you, you may not get out of the stall safely.



✓ **Never sneak up on a horse or touch it if the horse is not aware you are near.**

Horses can be very nervous. When startled, the natural urge of the horse is to flee or strike out for protection. Speak to the horse quietly, and let it know you are near before touching it. Touch the horse gently first, and stroke its shoulder and neck area before moving closer.

✓ **Never bolt the door of the stall while you are in the stall.**

A closed door may keep a horse from bolting out the door, but if you approach the horse safely, this should never happen. A bolted stall door is dangerous if the horse becomes unpredictable.

✓ **Never duck under the lead rope when a horse is tied.**

If the horse spooks or strikes out when tied to a wall with a lead rope, you would be in a high risk situation. Keeping a hand on the horse and speaking gently, go around the back end of the horse, staying well clear of the kick zone, to get the other side.

✓ **Never leave equipment such as pitchforks, wheelbarrows and muck buckets in the stall or out in the aisle.**

Do not leave equipment unattended if there is a horse near or about to come into the area. There is a high risk of injury to the horse and the handler if the horse should knock over a pitchfork and get a puncture wound or get tangled in the wheelbarrow or muck bucket and become panicked at the noise and feeling trapped.

✓ **Never wrap the end of the lead rope around your hand or your body.**

If the horse spooks or runs away from you, you will not be able to unwind the rope fast enough and you will likely get a very bad rope burn. Other horse handlers have been pulled off their feet or had their hands or wrists broken when they have done this.

- ✓ **Never drag the end of the lead rope.**
A dragging rope can spook or trip your horse and it may trip you. The horse may step on the end of the lead, resulting in the horse spooking or trying to escape the sudden pressure on the halter. Keep ends of any rope neatly folded back and forth in your hand. Do not circle the end of the rope but fold it back and forth on itself and hold the folded rope end in your other hand.
- ✓ **If you have long hair, tie it back with a braid or secure pony tail.**
Long hair will frequently become tangled with lead ropes, crossties or other equipment and this can be a dangerous situation. Do not allow your long hair to blow around or fall over your face. Never flip your braid or pony tail to your back, but move it slowly out of the way if it falls to the front where it will get in the way.
- ✓ **When cleaning out stalls, never leave the shovel, broom or pitchfork in the stall.**
Equipment left in the stalls can cause injury to the horse. Punctures from a pitchfork covered in manure and bacteria are particularly dangerous for horse or human due to the risk of tetanus.
- ✓ **When leading horses, only lead one horse at a time.**
Keep your concentration on the horse at all times and be aware of any potential dangers in the road ahead. Do not lead more than one horse at a time, as this is very dangerous. If one horse spooks or pulls back, this can upset the second horse. Trying to calm down two horses at one time is difficult and dangerous and frequently leads to one or more horses running off.
- ✓ **Do not use cell phones while you are handling horses.**
Keep your cell phone turned off while you are handling horses or near horses. The ring can startle the horse. When you are on the phone, you will not be paying attention to the horse. You can check for messages later, when the horse is safely put back in its stall or turned out.
- ✓ **Handlers are never loud or rowdy in their behaviour when near horses.**
Keep your voice low when around horses as yelling can cause a horse to startle. Do not allow anyone to run, throw things, or make loud noises near the horse.
- ✓ **Always approach the horse from his left and from the front.**
Keep your approach slow and gentle and use a soft, calm voice. Stroke or softly rub the shoulder as you get near.

Learn more about how to stay safe around horses by taking Equine Guelph's short online course [Horse Behaviour & Safety](#)—adult and youth offerings available!