

RSA



# HORSE ROAD SAFETY

On Public Roads

Údarás Um Shábháilteacht Ar Bhóithre  
Road Safety Authority



**HORSE SPORT**  
IRELAND

## Disclaimer

The overall aim of this booklet is to promote safety, good driving practice and courtesy when using our roads according to the law. It is an interpretation of the law from a road safety point of view. It covers the road traffic laws currently in force, but it will be updated to take account of new laws. If you have a query, you should check the legislation or ask a Garda.



# Road Safety Authority

The Road Safety Authority (RSA) is Ireland's primary road safety organisation and an official statutory body. The aim of the Road Safety Authority is to save lives and prevent injuries by reducing the number and severity of collisions on the road. This is reflected in our maxim, Working to Save Lives.

Our key objectives are to provide a safe environment for all road users and to promote the efficient use of our road network.

The RSA works to improve road safety in Ireland by:

- developing and implementing information and education campaigns to increase awareness of road safety and promote safer driving;
- improving vehicle standards;
- establishing and monitoring a standard for driver instruction;
- overseeing the system of driver licensing and undertaking certain enforcement activities;
- working with stakeholders to ensure a co-ordinated response and ensure our collective resources are used wisely and efficiently;
- undertaking collision and road safety research in order to develop measures and recommendations to improve road safety;
- advising the Minister for Transport on road safety policy;
- producing road safety strategy documents and monitoring their implementation; and
- promoting responsible use of the road network by all road users including those riding, driving or leading horses.

## About Horse Sport Ireland

Horse Sport Ireland (HSI) is the national governing body for equestrian sport in Ireland. It is responsible for promoting and developing the sport horse sector, bringing together the sporting, breeding and leisure sides of the industry.

HSI is recognised by the international governing body, the Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI), the Olympic Council of Ireland (OCI) and the Irish Sports Council (ISC). It is funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, the Irish Sports Council and Sport Northern Ireland (SNI).

There are 25 organisations affiliated to HSI with the potential for members from each organisation to ride, drive or lead horses on Irish roads. HSI provides information to affiliate organisations and the wider Irish equestrian community. To find out more, visit **[www.horsesportireland.ie](http://www.horsesportireland.ie)**.

The Road Safety Authority has collaborated with Horse Sport Ireland to produce this Horse Road Safety publication.



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## Riding, leading or driving horses on the road

Horses have been using the roads for many years both to carry people and to transport goods. Today, riding on the road may be part of a horse's training programme or just for leisure. For riders, it is an enjoyable change of environment, but there are safety risks. These include, but are not restricted to, traffic speeds, road surfaces and motorists' knowledge of dealing with horses. You can reduce these risks with road safety knowledge and training.

Horses and riders have every right to be on our roads. However, they must follow the Rules of the Road. It is vital that every rider has a clear understanding of the Rules of the Road before taking a horse onto a public road.

If you are riding or leading a horse, you must stay on the left-hand side of the road and obey all Rules of the Road.

When leading a horse, you should walk so that the handler is between the horse and the traffic, so as to prevent the horse from interfering with the traffic.

When riding one horse and leading another horse, you must remain on the left-hand side of the road. You should ensure that the led horse is on the left-hand side of the ridden horse, to ensure the rider is positioned between the horse being led and the traffic. This is in order to control the led horse, in the interest of safety of all road users.

Before riding on the road you should always tell someone where you intend to go and when you will be back.

If you are in charge of a horse on a roadway, you must make sure the horse does not block other traffic or pedestrians.

It is best not to bring a horse on the road at night. If you do, you should carry a lamp showing a white light to the front and a red light to the back. You should also wear reflective clothing and put suitable reflective equipment on the horse.

If the weather is bad, you should not ride on the road unless it is absolutely necessary. Motorists will already be experiencing difficult driving conditions and meeting an anxious horse may present a dangerous situation.

If you encounter a hazard, which may be frightening, try to prevent your horse looking at it. If possible signal traffic to slow down by using the correct hand signals (we explain these on page 8). Try to keep your horse straight and moving forward. Ride in a positive way to reassure your horse with a calm but assertive tone.

Do not ride, lead or drive a horse while under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

## Riding in company

If you are riding in company on the road, avoid blocking traffic. A group of horses and riders should divide into smaller groups (half a horse's length between horses), leaving enough space between groups for a motorist to pass easily. There should be an experienced rider at the front and back of each group of riders. Each small group should always cross a road or junction as a unit. Do not let one horse become isolated from the group as it will become anxious.

## Horse-drawn vehicles

Drivers of horse-drawn vehicles must use the same hand signals as riders. The horse-drawn vehicle must have two red rear reflectors. At night, the horse-drawn vehicle must also carry a lamp on the right-hand side of the vehicle showing a white light to the front and a red light to the back.

You must not drive a horse-drawn vehicle while under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

# Rider clothing and safety equipment

- wear clothing that fits properly and that does not need constant adjusting as this may interfere with controlling your horse or pony;
- make sure your clothing includes fluorescent and reflective materials;
- wear appropriate clothing to help protect your skin if you have a fall; and
- do not wear clothes that 'flap' (for example, an open jacket) as this may startle the horse and affect your control.

## Riding hats and helmets

Riding hats and helmets are the most important items of personal protective equipment and they should meet safety standards. However, they only protect you when they fit properly, all straps are correctly adjusted and the chin strap is fastened. If your helmet hits something solid in a fall, replace it even if you cannot see any damage.

The safety standard that your hat or helmet meets is shown on the inside of the hat by one or more of the following marks:

- BSEN 1384 – 1997;
- EN 1384 – 1996 with a Kitemark;
- PAS 015;
- SNELL E2001;
- ASTM F1163; and
- AS/NZ 3838 2006.

## Body protectors

A body protector will give you some protection in a fall. It may not prevent serious injury but it can increase your chances of staying alive and reduce the severity of any injuries. You should only buy body protectors and riding hats and helmets from recognised retailers who know how to fit them correctly.

## Footwear

You should wear footwear with a hard sole and a small heel to prevent your feet slipping through the stirrups. Never wear fashion footwear or Wellingtons while riding. Also, make sure the tread of your footwear is not too thick or heavy as this might cause your feet to become wedged, or stuck, in the stirrups.

## Gloves

It is a good idea to wear gloves with extra grip to help protect your hands. Choose brightly coloured gloves that include reflective materials as this will make it easier for other road users to see your hand signals.



## Crop

If you choose to carry a crop, carry it in your right hand (as this is the side next to the traffic). Never raise the crop when using your right hand to signal.

## High-visibility clothing and equipment

When riding, both you and your horse should always wear fluorescent and reflective clothing so that other road users can see you. This includes high-visibility vests, armbands, hat bands and reflective leg bands or boots. These safety accessories should meet European safety standards.

If you use stirrup lights or hand lights when leading a horse, these should have a white light to the front and a red light to the back.



# Horse tack, equipment and shoes

## Horse tack and equipment

Tack and equipment should fit the horse correctly and be in good repair, especially the stitching, the leather under buckles, the leather attached to the bit and the stirrup leathers. If the tack or equipment is not comfortable, the horse may be distracted and unwilling to respond to your aids or instructions.

## Horse shoes and trimming

Your horse should be shod according to the amount of road work it does. Thin, shiny shoes or loose shoes can cause a horse to slip or fall on the road.

# Road craft – signs and signalling

## Road signs

- learn the meanings of all road signs and markings. Obey all mandatory signs such as STOP and YIELD;
- when you approach a STOP sign, you must stop completely before entering the major road;
- at a YIELD sign you must give way to any traffic on a major road ahead and you must not proceed onto the main road until it is safe to do so;
- be particularly careful when road signs warn of hazards ahead; and
- heed warning or information signs which can help you plan to stay safe.

## Signalling

- you must signal your intentions on the road;
- your signals must be clear, decisive and given in good time;
- never signal with a crop in your signalling hand;
- always look behind you before you signal; and
- never move off or turn without signalling.

## Asking a driver to slow down

Make eye contact with the driver. Put both reins in your left hand with your crop under your left thumb. When it is safe to do so, extend your right arm at shoulder level, with your palm facing the ground. Move your arm up and down slowly and repeat as necessary. Place your hand back on the reins before the driver passes.



## Asking a driver to stop

Make eye contact with the driver. Put both reins and crop in your left hand. When it is safe to do so, extend your right arm at shoulder level with your elbow bent and your palm facing the driver. Place your hand back on the reins before passing the vehicle.



## Road craft at junctions

**Life Saver Look – This is your final check of traffic from all directions before moving off or changing route.**

### Left turns

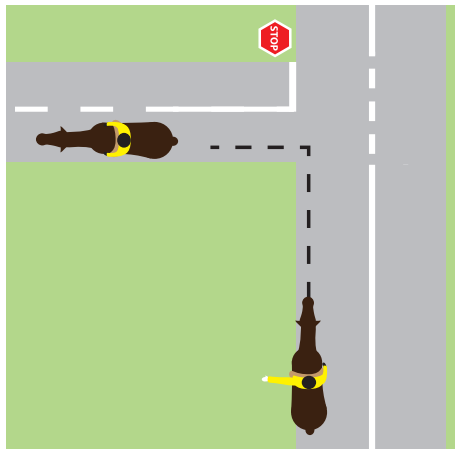
- stay in the left lane when you are turning left;
- plan your turn well in advance;
- check for traffic. Signal in good time when it is safe to do so. Check for traffic again before reaching the left turn;
- use the Life Saver Look, and look over both shoulders, when it is safe to do so;
- do not let cyclists or motorists come up on the left side of the horse;
- never ride between a vehicle that is turning left and the kerb. Stay well behind, let the vehicle go first and, then turn;
- never pass a vehicle on the inside as it may turn left; and
- keep well clear of buses and trucks near junctions.



## Indicating a left turn

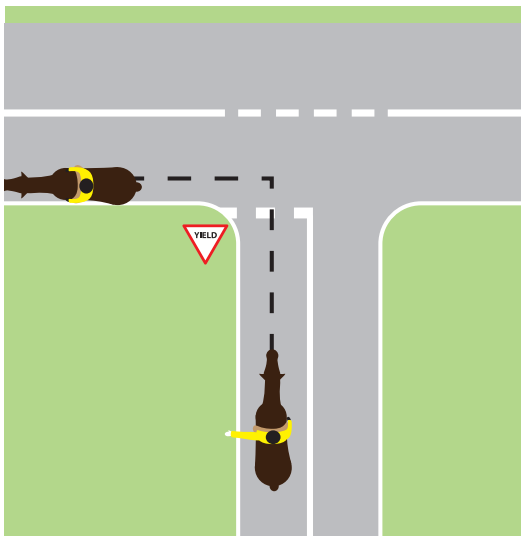
- put the reins and the crop into your right hand;
- when it is safe to do so, extend your left arm at shoulder level, with the fingers together and your palm facing to the front;
- keep your hand out for about 3 seconds before placing your hand back on the reins;
- check the traffic again, use the Life Saver Look and look over both shoulders. When it is safe to do so, make the turn; and
- in case of a lengthy delay consider a repeat hand signal.

## Left turn from a major road to a minor road



- on your approach to the junction, keep to the left, and look and listen for traffic coming from both directions;
- when it is safe to do so give a left-hand signal in plenty of time;
- check for traffic again; and
- when it is safe to do so, use the Life Saver Look, look over both shoulders and turn left into the minor road. Keep looking and listening for traffic as you turn.

## Left turn from a minor road to a major road



- on your approach to the junction, hold your position in the centre of the lane, look and listen for traffic coming from both directions;
- when it is safe to do so, give a left-hand signal in plenty of time;
- check for traffic again and use the Life Saver Look over both shoulders;
- always ride up to the mouth of the junction, ensuring you are visible at all times;
- stop or yield as applicable, and check for traffic coming from all directions;

- if you have to stop and wait for traffic to pass, stay behind the road marking and keep checking both roads; and
- signal again, give the Life Saver Look and, when safe to do so, turn left, checking for traffic all the time.

**If your horse cannot cope with traffic passing on both sides, avoid routes which include junctions with filter lights and so on.**

## Right turns

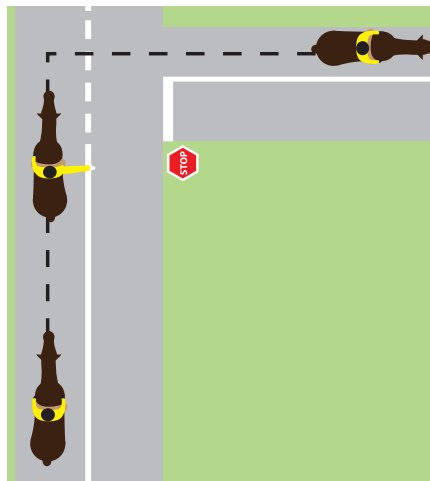
- turning right can be more dangerous;
- plan your turn well in advance;
- when it is safe to do so, signal in good time;
- move into the centre of the lane when you are turning;
- check for traffic. Signal when safe and in good time;
- check again for traffic before reaching the right turn;
- when you reach the junction, stop, and check traffic again; and
- when it is safe to go, use the Life Saver Look, signal again and make your turn safely without delay.

## Indicating to turn right or pass an obstacle or parked vehicle

- put both reins in your left hand with your crop under your left thumb;
- when it is safe to do so, extend your right arm at shoulder level, with your fingers together and your palm facing to the front; and
- keep your arm out for about 3 seconds then place your hand back on the reins, check traffic again and proceed.



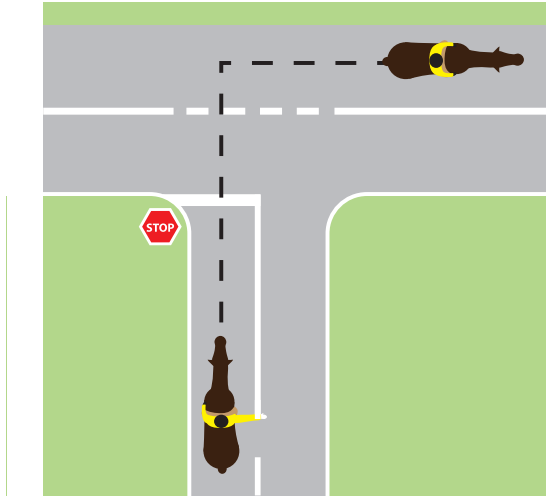
## Right turn from a major road to a minor road



- on your approach to the junction, hold your position in the centre of the lane, look and listen for traffic approaching from both directions;
- when it is safe, give a right-hand signal in plenty of time;
- check for traffic again;
- ride up to the mouth of the junction, checking for traffic at all times. Stop when you are opposite the left lane of the minor road;
- use the Life Saver Look including looking over both shoulders to check for traffic, especially coming up behind you;

- when safe to do so, turn right onto the minor road, keep your position in the centre of the lane and keep looking and listening for traffic; and
- if you have to stop and wait for approaching traffic to pass, once the road is clear signal again. Use the Life Saver Look and make your turn.

## Right turn from a minor road to a major road

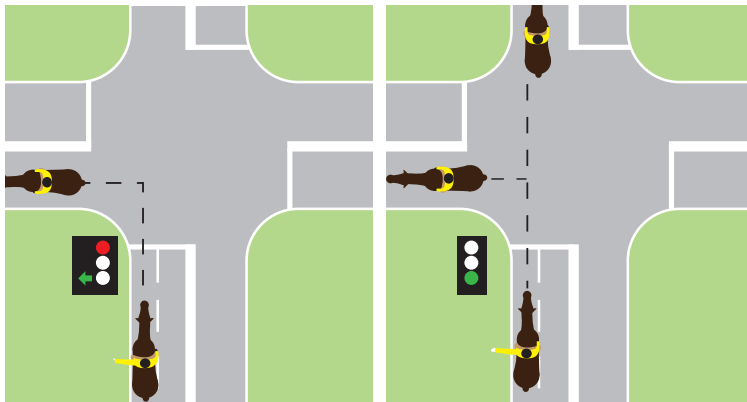
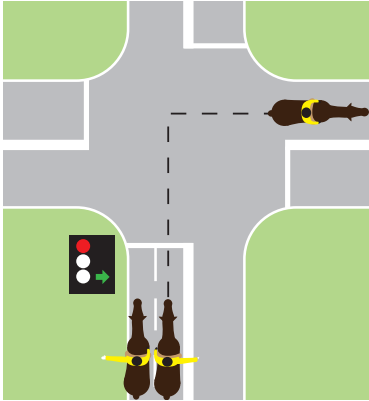


- on your approach to the junction, hold your position in the centre of the lane, look and listen for traffic approaching from both directions;
- when it is safe to do so, give a right-hand signal in plenty of time;
- check for traffic again;
- ride up to the mouth of the junction, checking for traffic at all times. Stop and check for traffic on the major road;
- use the Life Saver Look including looking over both shoulders to check for traffic, especially traffic coming up behind you;
- when it's safe to do so continue straight across the road and only turn right after reaching the other side. Keep looking and listening for traffic while crossing the road. Keep well into the left on the new major road; and
- if you have to stop and wait for traffic to pass, stay behind the road marking and keep checking all roads for traffic until clear. Signal again, use the Life Saver Look and make your turn.



## Road craft – traffic lights

The sequence of traffic lights is: GREEN → AMBER → RED → GREEN

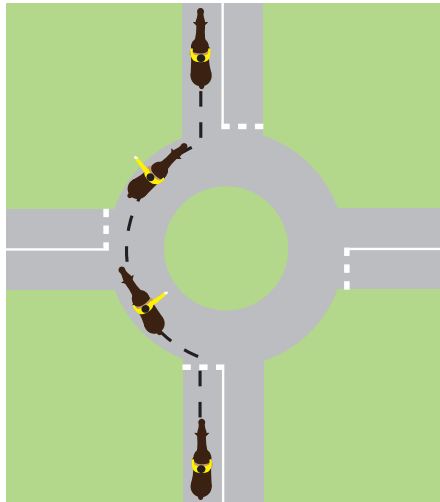


- an amber light means that you must not go beyond the stop line or, if there is no stop line, you must not go beyond the light. However, you may go on if you are so close to the line or the light when the light turns amber that stopping would be dangerous;
- never try to race through an intersection when the traffic lights show amber;
- come to a full stop behind the road marking or lights when the lights are red;
- do not move off until the lights have turned green and it is safe to do so;

- on approaching the traffic lights, hold your position in the centre of the lane, look and listen for traffic;
- when it is safe to do so, give a hand signal of your intended direction;
- keep checking the traffic until the lights turn green;
- give a second hand signal, check the traffic from all directions again using the Life Saver Look; when
- when it is safe to do so, ride on, checking for traffic all the time. See also the sections on signs and signalling and junctions.

## Roundabouts

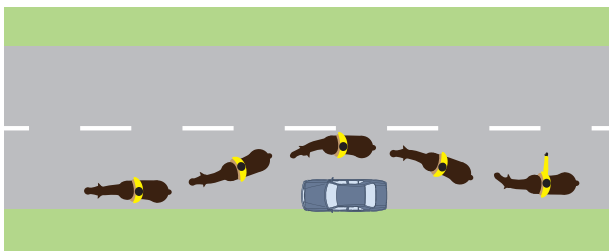
If your horse cannot cope with traffic passing on both sides, avoid routes which include roundabouts.



- decide as early as possible which exit you need to take;
- on your approach to a roundabout, keep to the centre of the lane you have selected, look and listen for traffic;
- at the junction, give way to traffic already on the roundabout;
- check again for traffic, give the Life Saver Look and, when it is safe to do so, enter the roundabout;
- keep to the centre of your selected lane while on the roundabout;
- when approaching the exit you plan to take, look around to check the traffic and, when it is safe to do so, give a left-hand signal. Check the traffic again, especially over your left shoulder and, when it is safe to do so, leave the roundabout; and
- watch out for traffic crossing your path.

## Road craft – passing

- by looking well ahead, you can plan to pass safely without making any last minute sudden changes in direction;
- cars, trucks and buses can be dangerous to riders and horses, even when they are parked;
- when you are passing a parked vehicle, check for traffic and, when it is safe to do so, signal. Use the Life saver look well in advance of moving out;
- leave plenty of space when you are passing. Someone may open a door or there may be a loose animal – perhaps a dog – in a parked vehicle. Either could startle your horse when you are passing;
- always ride in single file when you are passing a parked vehicle;
- remember all vehicles have blind zones and drivers may not be able to see you; and
- before moving back to the left-hand side check that it is safe to do so.





## **HORSE SPORT**

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## **IRELAND**

# Horse Sport Ireland's recommendations

### **Liability and insurance**

All road users have a duty of care to share the road in a safe and socially responsible way. Horse owners may be liable if their horse injures another road user or damages their property, for example, their car. This may result in the payment of considerable damages.

If you ride, drive or lead a horse on the road, you should hold public liability insurance (also known as third party insurance). This form of insurance covers you if your horse is found to have injured someone or damaged their property. Public liability insurance is included in the membership of some equine associations. You can also get it through insurance companies.

### **Mobile phones**

Do not use your mobile phone while riding, driving or leading a horse. Always keep your mobile phone on silent when riding. This is to avoid distracting your attention from controlling your horse.

It is also a good idea to put the names and phone numbers of people to be contacted in an emergency into your phone. Type the letters ICE (In Case of Emergency) before each name. This helps the emergency services if you are involved in a collision. They can quickly scan through your phone to find the names. Your emergency contacts could include, for example, your next of kin, your doctor and your vet.

## Shod for the road

Horses' shoes and hooves that are in good condition prevent stumbling, slipping and a possible fall on the road. You should use a qualified farrier. You can get a list of qualified farriers from the HSI website **[www.horsesportireland.ie](http://www.horsesportireland.ie)**.

## Road safety training and examinations

You can get a list of recognised Ride and Road Safety Trainers on the HSI website **[www.horsesportireland.ie](http://www.horsesportireland.ie)**.

Two Ride and Road Safety examinations currently take place in Ireland:

### Pony Club Road Safety Test

This test is available only to members of the Irish Pony Club. Children taking this test must be at least 12 years old. For more information, see **[www.horsesportireland.ie](http://www.horsesportireland.ie)**.

### British Horse Society (BHS) Ride and Road Safety Exam

This exam is open to both members and non-members of the BHS aged 12 years and over. For more information, see **[www.horsesportireland.ie](http://www.horsesportireland.ie)**.

## Advice for motorists and other road users

Most collisions on the road involving horses happen when the horse is struck from behind.

Horses and their riders are extremely vulnerable in a collision and can be seriously – sometimes fatally – injured.

You must always be careful when passing horses and riders on the road. A horse may startle. The rider may be a child or an adult in training. Never pass unless it is safe to do so.

- be alert when approaching riding schools or places where horses are likely to appear;
- take special care when overtaking horses, especially loose horses or horse-drawn vehicles. This is particularly relevant at junctions where motorists are advised to keep a safe distance from horses and riders;
- slow down when approaching a horse and rider. Be prepared to stop and let them pass;
- obey a signal to slow down or stop from someone in charge of a horse. They may know about a potential hazard which you cannot see or hear.
- pass by slowly, driving wide of the horse and rider;
- don't use your horn or lights in a way that might startle or blind a horse. This could cause the rider to lose control of the animal;
- if you are carrying a roof load or towing a trailer, take special care when passing horses;
- if you drive a heavy goods vehicle, know the dimensions of your load. Be aware that the sound of airbrakes might startle a horse; and
- show courtesy to riders and their horses, and take steps to minimise engine and other noise when passing safely.

Always drive at a speed that allows you to stop:

- safely in a controlled way;
- on the correct side of the road;
- within the distance you can see to be clear; and
- without risk to you, your passengers or other road users.

## Dealing with a riding collision on the road

Follow these guidelines if a rider has a fall on the road.

- warn traffic coming from all directions. Make safe the area around the fallen rider;
- if your vehicle is stationary, turn on your hazard warning lights;
- call for help. Depending on the severity of the fall, phone 999 or 112 for an ambulance, or phone a family member or doctor;
- check if the rider is conscious. Do not move them if there is a threat of a back or neck injury. Do not remove the riding hat (but you may open the chin strap);
- keep reassuring the injured rider and keep them warm until help arrives; and
- if a horse is injured or loose, ask the Gardaí for help.

### **If you phone for an ambulance, you will be asked the following questions, in this order:**

1. What phone number are you calling from?
2. What is the location of the collision?
3. What is the main problem?
4. How many people are injured?
5. About what age are the injured people?
6. Are they male or female?
7. Are they conscious?
8. Are they breathing normally?
9. If over 35 years, are they experiencing chest pain?
10. If trauma, are they experiencing severe bleeding?



## Horse Road Safety at a glance

**Always** tell someone where you intend to go and when you will return.

**Always** check that your tack is in good repair and fits your horse correctly.

**Always** check that your horse's shoes are in a safe condition to go on the road.

**Always** plan to ride safe routes. Keep away from busy roads, if possible.

**Always** wear a riding hat or helmet that meets current safety standards. Make sure it fits correctly and fasten the chin strap at all times.

**Always** make sure that drivers can see you at all times regardless of weather conditions. Wear high-visibility clothing and put high-visibility equipment on your horse.

**Always** position yourself between the horse being led and the traffic so that you have maximum control over the horse, while leading, or riding and leading.

**Always** show courtesy to other road users. A smile and a nod are enough if it is safer to keep your hands on the reins.

**Always** give clear and accurate hand signals to let other road users know your intentions.

**Always** remain alert, attentive and observant. Remember the Life Saver Look at junctions – it could save your life.

**Never** ride in rush hour traffic.

**Never** ride in fading light or darkness.

**Never** ride in dangerous weather conditions.

**Never** ride on unsafe roads or roads prone to ice in cold weather.

**Never** use a mobile phone or music player that may distract your attention or affect your control of your horse.

**Never** bring a novice horse on the road unless it has the company of an experienced horse.

**Never** bring a child or novice rider on the road unless they are mounted on an experienced horse and in the company of an experienced rider.

**Never** take a large group of riders on the road without a safety plan. Divide into smaller groups. Each group should have an experienced leader at the front and back. Leave a space between groups for a vehicle to pass safely.

**Never** allow a horse to break away from the group. Always cross a road as one unit.

**Never** block traffic unnecessarily.



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**IRELAND**

## Horse Sport Ireland Affiliate Organisations

Army Equestrian School (Department of Defence)  
Association of Irish Riding Clubs  
Association of Irish Riding Establishments  
Carriage Driving Section of Horse Sport Ireland  
Dressage Ireland  
Eventing Ireland  
Federation of Irish Polo Clubs  
Hunting Association of Ireland  
Irish Harness Racing Club  
Irish Polocrosse Association  
Irish Pony Club  
Irish Pony Society  
Irish Shows Association  
Irish Universities Riding Clubs Association  
Medical Equestrian Association  
Mounted Games Association of Ireland  
Para Equestrian Ireland  
Riding for the Disabled Association Ireland  
Royal Dublin Society  
Showjumping Ireland  
TREC Ireland

## Acknowledgements

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### Horse Sport Ireland

For more information, visit [www.horsesportireland.ie](http://www.horsesportireland.ie), call (045) 850 800 or email [info@horsesportireland.ie](mailto:info@horsesportireland.ie).

Working To Save Lives



**HORSE SPORT**  
**IRELAND**



**Plain English**  
Approved by NALA

**Údarás Um Shábháilteacht Ar Bhóithre**  
**Road Safety Authority**

Páirc Ghnó Ghleann na Muaidhe, Cnoc an tSabhaircín, Bóthar Bhaile Átha Cliath, Béal an Átha, Co. Mhaigh Eo  
Moy Valley Business Park, Primrose Hill, Dublin Road, Ballina, Co. Mayo  
locall: 1890 50 60 80 fax: (096) 25252 email: [info@rsa.ie](mailto:info@rsa.ie) website: [www.rsa.ie](http://www.rsa.ie)