

Horse Trailering

- Because horses are traveling more than ever before, it's easy to forget that trailering can be a source of anxiety for horses.
- Horse owners must take precautions to reduce their horses' stress so their horses will not harm themselves or others.
- Reducing stress before trailering and ensuring proper hydration are critical to keeping your horse healthy during and after travel.
- After trailering, monitor your horse for the development of respiratory disease.
- After long-distance trailering, horses need several days to recover and regain full immune function.

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It has become commonplace to trailer horses everywhere: a short trip to the park for a trail ride, a lesson across town, or an appointment at the veterinary hospital. Traveling three states away for a horse show or field trip or traveling south for the winter used to be a big deal, but not any more. Because horses are traveling more, it's easy to forget that trailering can cause them anxiety. The following guidelines will help improve the trailering experience for your horse and you, whether for short or long hauls.

Stress and Health

It is stressful for horses to enter a small, enclosed trailer and then speed down the highway at 65 mph. Horses prefer open spaces, where their instinctive flight response can be lifesaving. However, modern horses have had to learn to control their natural tendency to flee.

Young horses up to 3 years of age are particularly at risk for stress-related health problems. Dehydration and/or stress before trailering, such as weaning, showing, racing, or endurance competition, can increase the likelihood of acquiring a stress-related health problem. Therefore, reducing stress before trailering and ensuring proper hydration are critical to keeping your horse healthy during and after travel.

Vaccination is important in preventing equine influenza and rhinopneumonitis. Boosters should be given every 60 to 90 days to horses at high risk of exposure, and your horse's vaccinations should be up to date within 10 to 14 days before going on a long trip. It may be prudent to also vaccinate your horse for other diseases before traveling. Discuss your horse's risk of exposure to other infectious diseases, such as strangles and botulism, with your veterinarian.

Trailering Problems

Trailering problems include refusing to enter or leave the trailer as well as scrambling, all of which can cause injury to horses or people. Horse owners must take precautions to reduce their horses' stress, so their horses will not harm themselves or others. Most stress-related trailering problems can be avoided by taking suitable precautions. Solving a

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trailering problem can be as easy as backing the horse into the trailer using a platform instead of a ramp, walking the horse slowly around and then into the trailer, including another horse that trailers well, or counterconditioning and/or desensitizing the horse by using treats (ask your veterinarian or a certified animal behaviorist about this last one).

Load Training

Horses sustain many avoidable injuries while being loaded into trailers. Make sure that everyone who loads your horse into a trailer is trained in proper loading techniques, including secure tying of your horse and wrapping of your horse's legs.

Choices and Considerations

Trailer Safety Training

Everyone who hauls your horse should be trained in all aspects of trailer safety, including driving and hitching the trailer as well as checking the brakes and lights.

Leg Wraps

Before trailering your horse, wrap all of your horse's legs. Learn how to apply good leg wraps or buy commercial wraps. Leg wraps protect the most vulnerable parts of your horse, preventing costly and dangerous leg wounds.

Ventilation

Regardless of the outdoor temperature, open your trailer's vents and windows. If it's cold outdoors, protect your horse with a blanket. Inadequate trailer ventilation can cause overheating and allows infectious and particulate materials to build up in the air. Dusty hay and bedding should not be used in trailers because they can blow around and be inhaled by your horse when the trailer is moving. Tie your horse's head loosely to allow some movement. When a horse's head is tied upright and too tightly, the horse is more prone to developing pneumonia (shipping fever) after trailering.

Preparing for Emergencies

To prepare for emergencies, your veterinarian is your best source of information, but here are some recommendations:

- Always take a first-aid kit with you.
- Learn how to bandage wounds.
- Learn how to obtain your horse's temperature, pulse, and respiration.

- Know the signs of a dehydrated horse, such as depression, holding the head low, weakness, increased heart rate (more than 50 beats per minute at rest), and increased breathing (more than 12 breaths per minute).
- Attach an identification card to the inside wall of your trailer indicating whom to call if an accident occurs.

Accommodations and Rest

Overnight accommodations should be planned in advance. Some hotels and motels allow overnight parking of horse trailers. Overnight boarding may also be available along your route. For information, check Web sites dedicated to travelers with horses.

Give your horse short rest periods during a long trip to help boost his or her immune system. Rest your horse at least once every 24 hours. More frequent stops of every 6 to 8 hours are better for your horse and you. At these stops, unload your horse, provide hay and water, and encourage your horse to lower his or her head.

After Trailering

After trailering, monitor your horse for the development of respiratory disease. Call your veterinarian if your horse develops any of the following signs: cough, nasal discharge, fever, depression, or decreased appetite.

After long-distance trailering, horses need several days to fully recover and regain full immune function.

Clean your trailer between trips to help prevent the transfer of bacteria and viruses. Be sure to clean out all hay to prevent your horse from inhaling moldy hay on the next trip.