

Advice for Riding in Winter.

Wear Hi Viz!

Will you be able to see, and will motorists, cyclists and pedestrians be able to see you and your horse? – To fully prepare for this, we strongly recommend wearing Hi-Viz fluorescent clothing, jackets, hat covers, boots, exercise sheets etc. even during the daytime, and whether you are on road or off road! For more information please contact the BHS Safety department on 02476 840563.

Temperature .

What will you and your horse wear? Depending on how energetic your ride or carriage drive is, don't forget to wrap up warm but wear breathable enough material so that you don't overheat or come home sweating. Why not pack a picnic and flask of soup for the return to your yard, then after your horse has been untacked and wrapped up snug, you and your friends can get warm together sharing a hot lunch. OH - AND DON'T FORGET TO WIGGLE YOUR TOES! We are sure we are not the only ones who have gone out riding on a cold day and come back with frozen toes, then dismounted sending the blood back to our toes with great agony.

Preplan your journey.

What time will you set off? Remember at dusk and dawn when the sun is very low in the sky, it can be impossible for drivers to see anything in front of them in certain places on the road. Also at these times when temperature will be very low, fog can descend on low lying ground. Think about what time it will get dark and ask yourself if you will have time to get home? Where are you going to go and leave an emergency contact.

Stick to routes you know and let your friends know. If you do explore new routes, there is nothing better than local knowledge. Some routes may become inaccessible or hazardous after heavy rainfall for example, and local equestrians or landowners will be able to tell you if it is a route you are okay to use or better avoiding to dryer months.

On Road and Sealed surfaces (i.e. Concrete or Tarmac).

Ice comes in many shapes and forms, particularly black ice which will often hide on shaded areas or tarmac. Thin ice over puddles can crack, whereas sheets of ice on sealed surfaces can cover vast areas similar to an ice rink, the problem being, these often only catch our eye when it is too late. There is little we can do to avoid hooves slipping on ice other than to avoid it where possible, by being sensible; riding slowly, and providing your horses legs are well protected in the form of boots or bandages.

Ice Packing.

Ice packing in horses feet, commonly caused by heavy snow or icy mud, often induces bruising of the sole and ultimately lameness. The effect can be reduced by carrying a hoof pick and being aware when riding in thick snow or icy fields or arenas. Pick out the horses hooves when they are packed solid to relieve pressure and reduce the chances of injury.

Off-road and soft surfaces.

Senior Executive for the BHS Access and Rights of Way Department, Heather Clatworthy has this piece of advice "For those of you lucky enough to be able to access bridleways, byways, forestry, or permissive routes on other areas of land, please remember to look after them. The ground is vulnerable now until the spring, so overuse in vulnerable, wet areas, will soon turn into boggy ground and may restrict your use for the New Year. Always ride slowly in areas like this to keep ground impact to a minimum, stick to the legal (definitive in England and Wales) lines where you are allowed to go, but if you use the same route regularly, try to avoid taking the exact same line (if its wide enough to give you the choice), which will greatly reduce poaching of the ground. The more you protect it, the more likely it will stay useable until the better weather. Encourage your friends to do the same. Remember that old Vicar of Dibley sketch when you approach a large puddle, proceed with caution if you haven't been there for a while!"