

What Riders Should Do When Caught Riding a Horse in a Lightning Storm

As a seasoned horse owner and rider, you most likely keep an ear open for the weather report before setting out on your horse for an afternoon ride. Yet the warmth of spring and summer, and the waning warmth during fall will quite often bring storms that you may not have been prepared for. Quite often these storms are more than just a nuisance, and the lightning and thunder, hail, driving rains, and even flash floods are in effect dangerous to both horse and rider.

While you most certainly will not go on a ride if you know that a severe thunder storm warning has been issued, the often negligible warning of possible afternoon storms falls on deaf ears, simply because most often nothing comes of this possibility. Thus it is imperative that you, the experienced rider and horse owner, keep an eye on the weather whenever you are out and about with your horse. If you notice that a storm is brewing, do not waste any time but find an adequate shelter. Should you be close to the storm, you are at added risk for being struck by lightning. Generally speaking, being within 10 miles of the storm's epicenter puts you at an elevated risk of experiencing lightning.

Get off the high point! If in spite of your precautions you are caught in the open during a lightning storm, the very first thing you need to remember is to get off the horse. While you cannot outrun lightning, you are able to stay low and decrease your likelihood of getting hit. Stay out of river beds and off hills and ridges, and instead seek out the lower part of slopes. Tie your horse to a bush – never a tree – and squat down on your haunches. Stay away from large trees but smaller trees can also attract lightning. Open slopes with few trees can also be a danger. Again, stay away from trees and get as low in elevation as you can, as quickly and safely as you can. Wait out the storm and ride home after it has passed.

High winds are a danger since they can rip weakened trees from the ground and cause you and the horse to get hit with them or anything else it has loosened. Dismount and take cover behind something sturdy such as a boulder. Hail requires you to seek shelter that will protect you from above. If no building or cave can be found, head into a thicket of bushes. Find something with which to protect your head and the head of your horse. If all else fails, ensure that your horse puts down its head, and so should you.

One of the most misunderstood risks is the danger of flash floods. Previously babbling brooks suddenly swell because of heavy rain, and within relatively short periods of time they turn into raging rivers that sweep hoof and foot off anyone who attempts to cross them. Seek out a higher spot and stay away from streams.

Additionally, heavy rain negatively influences the soil conditions and riding on will be dangerous to you and your horse, since it is easy to lose your footing in this situation and severe injury to you and your horse may be sustained. Dismount immediately!

Should you be towing your horses in their trailer, stop and pull over. Ensure that the ramp is up, and nothing is touching the ground. Proper planning will help decrease the odds of you or your horse getting hurt by any weather related conditions.