

Safety Tidbits

General Safety.

Animals have a unique way of perceiving and reacting to their environment. Their hearing, eyesight, instincts and temperament all effect the way an animal will respond to a certain environment or situation. It is important for anyone who is going to be around animals to understand their behaviour and act accordingly in order to avoid unnecessary accidents.

General Handling Rules

The majority of accidents are the result of “people problems.” Lack of judgment or understanding due to inexperience is a major cause of accidents involving animals.

- Accidents often occur when people who are around animals are impatient, angry or act without thinking. Try to remain calm when working with animals to avoid upsetting them.
- It is also important to keep your mind on your job when you are working with animals. If your mind wanders, you may not realize that an animal is angry, or you may put yourself in a dangerous position (i.e. right behind a horse who kicks).
- Do not try to bully animals into doing what you want them to do. This is foolish because most farm animals are much bigger and stronger than humans and can easily bully you back with painful consequences. Remember, animals can kick harder than you can punch.
- Touching animals gently can be more effective than shoving and hitting them.
- **Did you know?** Some animal handlers believe that animals are responsive to soothing talk, singing, and hand signals. Try this the next time you are working with animals.
- Always leave yourself a way to escape a bad situation, especially when working in small spaces, with sick or injured animals, or animals with aggressive personalities. Make sure that there is fence to clime over or an opening to get through and out of harms way.
- Exercise extra care around strange animals. Always ask the owners permission before you approach an unfamiliar animal. Let animals such as dogs sniff your hand before you pet them. This is their way of finding out who you are.
- Use extreme care if strangers are around your animals. Animals that are friendly towards you may not trust people they don't know, and become very aggressive.
- People who are visitors or new to a farm should be warned about any animals with bad temperament so they can avoid contact with them or use extreme caution if they have to work with these specific animals.
- Do you know what animals to avoid on your farm?

- Wear protective clothing, footgear, and headgear as the job demands. Having hard-toed boots can help avoid injury if feet are trampled on (although this should be avoided in the first place). Protective headgear should always be worn when horseback riding.
- Work in pairs whenever possible. If one person is hurt or in danger the other may be able to help or get others to help.
- If you are going on a long horseback ride always tell someone where you are going and when you will be coming back. This way, if there is an accident, people will know where to look for you.
- Always make sure an adult is near by when you are around animals. Ask permission before going into an area where there is livestock. You never know what animals may be aggressive.
- Plan ahead if you are going to be sorting or moving livestock; take some time to think out the safest way to do so. Make sure you have enough people to help and the proper equipment beforehand. Animals will often resist being sorted or herded. The more frustrated animals and humans become the more likely accidents are to occur.

Animal Behaviour

Many accidents occur around livestock because people do not take the time to understand animal behaviour. Once you understand how animals are likely to act in certain situations and why they do the things they do it is easier to look after them and avoid being hurt.

- The way that animals are treated when they are young determines how they will behave as they grow up.
- Animals that are chased, slapped, kicked, hit, frightened, etc., in their early life will fear humans in their later life. This fear makes them harder to handle and may even make them aggressive towards humans.
- A red ribbon should be put on the tail of a horse that kicks. This means that you should stay away from horses that have red ribbons on their tails – they are not there for decoration!
- Animals that are treated with respect are easier to manage and are less likely to intentionally hurt humans.
- However, animals must also learn to respect humans. Farm animals like cows and bulls that are treated like pets may become aggressive as they grow older because they have not learnt to respect humans. Research has found that bulls that are hand fed and petted

too much when they are young often hurt people when they are older, because they have not learnt to respect humans.

- **Did you know?** Bulls that are friendly when they are young can become irritable and mean, as they get old. Be careful around old animals.
- Most animals get used to a certain routine. For example, cows get used to being milked at a certain time in a certain place. They may become confused or frightened when a routine is altered. Be especially calm and careful around animals whose routines have been changed.
- Stay away from animals that are excited or frightened. If you are herding animals and they become spooked, let the animals have room for a moment to give them a chance to calm down. A frightened cow or horse will plow right over you.
- Avoid animals that are sick or injured. Animals that are usually calm and safe may become dangerous when they are not feeling well because they are scared and in pain.
- Most animals have strong territorial instincts. In other words they feel comfortable in their pens, corrals or pastures and think that it is their personal property. They may become angry if someone enters their space or tries to remove them from it. Be careful when entering an animal's territory or moving an animal from it.
- Any animal that is used to living in a herd can become lonely and frightened, when separated from other animals. Be careful around animals that are used to being in a group when they are alone. Normally calm animals may spook more easily or be more aggressive towards humans if they are not happy about being away from their herd.
- Most animals are highly protective of their young. Be especially careful around newborn animals and their mothers. Many female animals may appear docile during pregnancy. However, they may become aggressive once they have given birth. New mothers should be watched carefully for signs of aggression.
- If a cow or sow has been violently possessive of her young in the past she will likely be the same way in the future. Make sure everyone is aware of which females are aggressive. It is important to make the first experience of motherhood as calm as possible for animals, so that they do not become possessive in the future.
- **Did you know?** Female animals may become particularly frightened around dogs, even ones they are used to, because they are scared that the dog may attack their young. To avoid upsetting a new mom, keep dogs away from her and her offspring.
- Male animals should be considered potentially dangerous at all times, Proper equipment and facilities are necessary to assure safety. Extreme caution should be practiced when handling male animals!

- Dairy cattle are generally more nervous than other animals, so it's important to approach these animals gently to avoid startling them. Once you have moved dairy cattle into milking stalls, give them a moment to adapt to the new environment before beginning to milk them.
- The size, weight, strength, and speed of both individual animals and herds of animals should never be taken for granted. Animals may not purposely hurt you, but their size makes them potentially dangerous at all times.
- Animals can become aggressive towards each other and humans during feeding. Studies have found that feed distributed in the same area in the same way often results in territorial behaviour among livestock. In other words, the animal decides that the area where the feed is placed is worth defending in order to secure access to the feed and exclude others. Keep livestock from fighting at the feed trough and even injuring a person by distributing feed in large, unpredictable patches.

WARNING SIGNS

Stay away from animals when they are angry.

- Look out for the following signs of aggression:
 - raised or pinned ears
 - raised tail
 - raised back hair
 - barred teeth
 - pawing the ground
 - snorting
- Always watch for signs of aggression. If an animal looks aggressive remain calm and walk away.

Hearing and Sight

Animals do not see or hear things the same way that humans do. It is important to understand how animals perceive their surroundings to predict how they will behave.

- Cattle and horses have panoramic vision, which means they can see everything except something that is directly behind them. Sudden movements behind these animals will "spook" them because they can see a quick movement but cannot distinguish how close it is or whether the movement is threatening or not. Animals may overreact to movement and possibly injure anyone who is near by. To avoid scaring an animal when you approach it, let them know you are there by speaking to the animal gently as you come near.

- Move slowly and deliberately around livestock.
- Because of poor eyesight, animals often hesitate when moving through an unfamiliar gate or into an unknown environment. Animals may spook at shadows or not want to step on unfamiliar ground. Yelling at an animal when it refuses to move will only make the problem worse. It is better to be patient with animals and let them become accustomed to their new surroundings as you are herding them.
- **Did you know?** Animals do not like moving from light spaces to dark spaces. If you are herding an animal into a new place make sure it is well lit so the animal will be less scared.
- Animals may spook easily because they are very sensitive to noise and will always try to move away from the direction or source of loud sounds. Their eyesight problems may cause them to crash against or through any objects (including humans) that may be in their path of escape, so be watchful of animals that are particularly sensitive to noise.
- Avoid loud noises and quick movements.
- Animals that are blind or deaf on one side may suddenly swing around to investigate disturbances on their blind or deaf side. If standing too close, you could easily be knocked down and trampled. Make sure you and anyone working with animals is aware of which ones have hearing or sight problems in order to avoid being on the wrong side of such an animal at the wrong time.

FACILITIES

- Make sure that areas where animals are being handled have good footing. Keep floors and ramps clean. Roughened concrete, cleated boots, and “no-slip” strips can help reduce the risk of falls.
- Make sure that barns, pastures and anywhere else that you may be handling animals are clean and tidy. Garbage left on the ground can be a tripping hazard and can become unhygienic. Garbage bins should be available to put trash into. Does your farm have enough garbage bins? Do you make sure that garbage is thrown away properly?
- Make sure that items such as pitchforks and shovels are kept safely away from animals. Never leave pitchforks and shovels on the floor, animals and humans can trip and injure themselves easily on these items.
- Pens, chutes, gates, fences, and loading ramps should be strong and work properly to avoid injuring a person or animal.
- A protruding piece of lumber, nail or bolt can cause painful and infectious injuries for both animals and humans. It may be a good idea to do routine inspections of your farm

to ensure that none of these hazards exist. It is important to fix such problems as soon as you find them.

- Shadows mixed with light spots inside handling facilities will increase an animals fear and tension. Try to keep the lighting in these moving areas dispersed evenly.
- There should never be smoking inside barns, garages or anywhere near things that are flammable such as stacks of hay. “No Smoking” signs should be posted at all exterior doorways as well as inside barns machine shops and other places where there are flammable items. If people do smoke, they should do so outside. Buckets filled with sand should be provided for people who smoke so that they can put out their cigarettes safely.
- Make sure that there are enough fire extinguishers on your farm. Fire extinguishers should be easily accessible. Make sure that everyone knows where the fire extinguishers are and how to use them.
- Remember, your family should have a plan of what to do if there is a fire. Do you know what to do?
- Every farm should have an emergency first aid kit for both humans and livestock. A list of emergency numbers should be posted by all phones.
- Once in a while pastures should be checked to make sure that there are no poisonous plants growing in them. Do you know what plants are poisonous and which are edible? Ask a parent or teacher or take out a book from the library to find out.

Teach others what you know about farm safety!