

LIGHTNING & HORSES

Lightning is something to be taken very seriously, especially when horses are concerned. Lightning strikes can injure horses. While 70% of humans that are struck by lightning survive, the injury is fatal in most horses, but not all. The reason may be that it is difficult to apply CPR to a horse, many horses are struck when no humans are around to observe the injury and seek help, and the larger body mass of the horse may provide greater tissue resistance leading to more heat buildup and tissue damage. Horses and other livestock may be found dead under a tree, in an open field, near an ungrounded wire, or in a shelter without a lightning rod. Oak trees are reported to be especially prone to lightning strike. Sudden death may be expected as the horse may still have grass in the mouth when found.

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 15km's of the storm's epicenter puts you at an elevated risk of experiencing lightning.

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 instead seek out the lower part of slopes of hills. Tie your horse to a bush – never a tree – and squat down on your haunches. Wait out the storm and ride home after it has passed.