

Transporting horses by road

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Note: although the United Kingdom has left the European Union (EU), certain pieces of legislation (formally known as 'retained EU law') will still apply until such time as they are replaced by new UK legislation; this means that you will still see references to EU regulations in our guidance.

This guidance is for England

It is an offence to transport any horse, as part of an economic activity, in a way that causes or is likely to cause it unnecessary suffering. Horses must not be transported unless they are fit for the intended journey. All necessary arrangements, including taking into account weather conditions, must be made in advance of commencing the transport of horses in order to minimise the length of the journey and to meet the animals' needs.

Vehicles used for the transport of horses must be designed, constructed, maintained and operated so as to avoid injury and suffering, and to ensure the safety of the animals.

Keepers must carry a horse passport (equine identification document) for each animal transported and may also require additional transport documentation depending on the length of the journey.

Although 'economic activity' (in other words, a business or trade) is not specifically defined in Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 *on the protection of animals during transport and related operations* it is clear that transport for commercial purposes is not limited to those occasions where an immediate exchange of money, goods or services takes place; it also includes transport that directly or indirectly involves or aims at a financial gain.

For the purposes of this guidance, 'horse' includes pony, donkey, ass, mule and hinny.

Horse passports

Horses must be accompanied by their horse passport at all times during transportation.

There are a few exemptions to this requirement. Passports are not required to accompany the horse during transport if it is:

- transported to and from registered summer grazing grounds, provided that the passport can be presented at the holding of departure
- unweaned and is accompanying their dam or foster mare
- participating in a training or test of an equestrian competition or event which requires them to leave temporarily the training, competition or event venue
- transported in an emergency situation relating to the animal itself or to the holding on which it is kept
- accompanied by a temporary document issued by a passport issuing agency
- accompanied by a smart card issued by a passport issuing agency

Temporary documents may only be used for up to 45 days and horses cannot be exported without additional documentation.

The person with primary responsibility for the horse must have the passport made available to them if they are not the owner.

It is an offence to transport a horse without its passport.

For more information please see 'Horse passports'.

Registered horses

All registered horses must be registered with a recognised breed society or company such as Weatherbys.

Registered horses that are not going to market or slaughter are exempt from the requirement for journey logs, watering and feeding intervals, journey times and rest periods, and animal transport certificates (ATCs).

Fitness of horses for transportation

A horse that is to be transported in connection with an economic activity must not be transported unless it is fit for the intended journey. A horse is not considered fit for transport if it is:

- ill
- injured
- infirm
- fatigued
- unable to move without pain or assistance
- prolapsed
- a newborn foal with unhealed navel
- a mare that has given birth during the previous week

- a mare that is beyond 90% of its gestation period, unless it is transported directly to the nearest available place for veterinary treatment or diagnosis

When animals fall ill during transport they must be separated from other animals and receive treatment as soon as possible.

Note: registered horses are exempt from the Regulation prohibiting the transport of pregnant females beyond 90% of their gestation period and transporting mares with their newly born foals, if the journey is to improve the health and welfare conditions of the birth, and if permanently accompanied throughout the journey by a dedicated attendant.

Handling

A horse may not be dragged or pushed by any means, or lifted by a mechanical device, unless under the supervision and in the presence of a veterinary surgeon who is arranging for it to be transported with all practicable speed to a place for veterinary treatment.

It is prohibited to:

- strike or kick the animals
- apply pressure to any particularly sensitive part of the body in such a way as to cause animals unnecessary pain or suffering
- use prods or other implements with pointed ends
- knowingly obstruct any animal that is being driven or led through any part where animals are handled
- lift or drag animals by the head, ears, legs or tail, or handle them in such a way as to cause unnecessary pain or suffering

Horses older than eight months, except unbroken horses, must wear halters during transport. For animals that need to be tied, the rope, tethers or other means used must:

- be strong enough not to break during normal transport conditions
- allow the animals to lie down, if necessary, and to eat and drink
- be designed in such a way as to eliminate any danger of strangulation or injury
- allow animals to be quickly released

Unbroken horses must not be transported in groups larger than four.

Welfare during transport

During transport, horses must be accompanied by a competent person.

Horses must not be transported in a vehicle with more than one deck in operation. Minimum internal height must be 75 cm higher than the height of the withers of the highest animal.

During long journeys, foals and young horses must be able to lie down.

When transported in groups, horses older than eight months must wear halters (unless they are unbroken).

Halters and ropes must:

- be strong enough not to break during normal transport conditions
- permit the animal, as necessary, to lie down, eat and drink
- be designed in such a way as to eliminate any danger of strangulation or injury, and so as to allow animals to be quickly released

Tied animals must be transported separately from untied animals.

Unbroken horses must not be transported in groups of more than four individual horses.

Horses must be handled and transported separately in the following cases:

- horses and ponies of significant different sizes
- horses that are hostile towards each other
- sexually mature males from females
- adult breeding stallions from each other

A stallion or a mare with a foal at foot may not be transported in the same undivided vehicle as any other horse (unless the horses were raised in compatible groups, are accustomed to each other or where separation will cause distress).

Protective boots, bandages, poll and tail guards, and rugs may be useful to protect those areas of the horse that are most likely to suffer bruising or rubbing during transport, or in the case of rugs, to keep the horse warm or to prevent chilling due to sweating. All equipment must fit correctly, be suitable for the purpose for which it is intended, and be securely fastened to prevent slipping or risk of injury. Additional information is available in the Defra document *Welfare of Animals During Transport: Advice for Transporters of Horses, Ponies and Other Domestic Equines*.

Permitted journey times

No horse may be transported on a journey in excess of eight hours, except in an approved vehicle. In an approved vehicle horses may be transported for 24 hours, as long as they are given liquid and (if necessary) fed at eight-hour intervals. At the end of the 24-hour period of transport, horses must be unloaded, fed, watered and rested for at least 24 hours.

Commercial journeys

During transport, horses must be accompanied by an animal transport certificate, giving details of the journey and the horses being transported. Persons transporting their own horses by their own means of transport and for a distance of less than 50 km from their holding are exempt from this requirement.

Anyone transporting horses in connection with an economic activity on journeys over 65 km and under eight hours must:

- have a short journey transporter authorisation (type 1) issued by Defra
- complete an animal transport certificate
- be in possession of a certificate of competence (for drivers or attendants)

For journeys over eight hours transporters must:

- have a long journey transporter authorisation (type 2) issued by Defra
- be in possession of a certificate of competence (for drivers or attendants)
- complete an animal transport certificate if journey is within the UK

- ensure a journey log is completed for journeys going outside the UK (this does not include registered horses)
- ensure the vehicle used has been inspected and approved
- ensure that contingency plans are in place in the event of an emergency
- have a navigation system in use

Animal transport certificates must be kept as a record for two years. Records obtained using the navigation system keep must be kept for three years (this requirement does not apply to registered equines).

Note: in all cases, a journey starts from a place where animals are first loaded and have been accommodated for at least 48 hours.

See also 'Transporting livestock by road: paperwork'; this guide also includes information on transporting livestock to (or through) the EU.

For further details of the legal requirements relating to the transportation of animals please contact APHA on 03000 200301.

Construction of vehicles

Vehicles used for the transport of horses must be designed, constructed, maintained and operated so as to:

- avoid injury and suffering and ensure the safety of the animals
- protect the animals from inclement weather, extreme temperatures and adverse changes in climate
- prevent the animals escaping or falling out
- ensure the air quality and quantity appropriate to the species transported can be maintained
- provide access to the animals to allow inspection
- minimise the leakage of urine or faeces
- provide a means of lighting sufficient for inspection of the animals
- provide sufficient space inside the animal compartment to ensure that there is adequate ventilation above the animals when they are standing in their natural position
- carry suitable equipment for loading and unloading
- provide anti-slip flooring
- provide partitions strong enough to withstand the weight of the animals and allow them to withstand the stresses of movement
- ensure fittings are designed for quick and easy operation
- constructed, maintained and operated so as to allow appropriate cleansing and disinfection

Where horses are not led into or out of a vehicle, the loading ramp must be provided with protection on each side, sufficient to prevent them from falling off or escaping. Ramps must not be steeper than an angle of 20° (36.4% to the horizontal). Where the slope is steeper than 10° (17.6% to the horizontal) ramps must be fitted with a system such as that provided by foot battens, which ensure that the animals climb or go down without risks or difficulties.

Precautions in the form of partitions must be fitted to support the horses and prevent them being thrown about by the motion of the vehicle.

Vehicles in which horses are transported must be clearly and visibly marked indicating the presence of live animals.

Vehicles used for the transport of horses for over eight hours must be inspected and approved by an

authorised body.

Space allowances

Space allowances when transporting equines

Age / type	Area (m² per animal)
adult horses	1.75 m ² (0.7 × 2.5 m)
young horses (6 - 24 months) (for journeys of up to 48 hours)	1.2 m ² (0.6 × 2 m)
young horses (6 - 24 months) (for journeys over 48 hours)	2.4 m ² (1.2 × 2 m)
ponies (under 144 cm)	2.4 m ² (1.2 × 2 m)
foals (0 - 6 months)	1.4 m ² (1 × 1.4 m)

Chapter VII of Annex I to Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 states: "These figures may vary by a maximum of 10% for adult horses and ponies, and by a maximum of 20% for young horses and foals, depending not only on the horses' weight and size but also on their physical condition, the meteorological conditions and the likely journey time".

Cleansing and disinfection of vehicles

This is covered by the Transport of Animals (Cleansing and Disinfection) (England) (No. 3) Order 2003.

Any person transporting horses must ensure that:

- they are loaded on to a means of transport that has been cleansed and, where necessary, disinfected
- any soiled litter and excreta are removed as soon as practicable

This applies to both pet and commercial horses.

Cleansing and disinfection of means of transport:

- **level of cleansing and disinfection.** All cleansing and disinfection must be carried out so as to reduce the transmission of disease
- **method of cleansing.** Cleansing must be by removing any feeding stuff to which the animals have had access, bedding, excreta and other material of animal origin, mud and other contaminants using appropriate means, and then cleaning with water, steam or (when appropriate) chemicals, until free of dirt
- **disinfection after cleansing.** After cleansing has been completed, anything to be disinfected must be disinfected using an approved disinfectant

If the same means of transport is used to transport cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, deer, racing pigeons and poultry then it must be cleansed and disinfected using an approved disinfectant before loading; see 'Cleansing and disinfection of vehicles' for more information.

Disposal of material after cleansing

All material removed from vehicles after cleansing has been carried out must have one of the following done to it:

- destroyed
- treated to remove the risk of transmission of disease
- disposed of so that animals have no access to it

Trading standards

For more information on the work of trading standards services - and the possible consequences of not abiding by the law - please see 'Trading standards: powers, enforcement and penalties'.

In this update

Detail about ramps added to the '**Construction of vehicles**' section.

Last reviewed / updated: August 2022

Key legislation

Transport of Animals (Cleansing and Disinfection) (England) (No. 3) Order 2003

Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 *on the protection of animals during transport and related operations*

Welfare of Animals (Transport) (England) Order 2006

Diseases of Animals (Approved Disinfectants) (England) Order 2007

Equine Identification (England) Regulations 2018

Please note

This information is intended for guidance; only the courts can give an authoritative interpretation of the law.

The guide's 'Key legislation' links may only show the original version of the legislation, although some amending legislation is linked to separately where it is directly related to the content of a guide. Information on amendments to legislation can be found on each link's 'More Resources' tab.

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