



# South Dakota 4-H Youth Horse Literacy Information

## Introduction

The South Dakota 4-H program has a long history of promoting equine education. Youth participating in equine projects are encouraged to maximize their education by taking advantage of many learning opportunities throughout the year. To mitigate the higher risk associated with participating in equine projects, a minimum of one Youth Horse Literacy (YHL) certified event is required each program year for youth interested in exhibiting equine in a county horse show or the state horse show. (In 2022, YHL replaced the former Horse Safety Program with a more diverse slate of educational opportunities; however, a YHL event must still contain an educational experience focused on safety.)

## Procedure (Updated March 1, 2026)

Here is a handy checklist SD 4-H horse exhibitors will complete before the annual June 1 deadline:

- Enroll youth and projects in 4HOnline
  - Upload horse animal information and photographs
  - Upload lease form, if applicable
- Complete at least one YHL certified event. (See menu of options on next page)
  - If attending the event in your own 4-H county, be sure to sign in at registration
  - If attending a YHL event out-of-county, you will receive a completion certificate that you can convey to your home 4-H county's Extension office.

## Special Notes

### 4-H State Horse Show Exhibitors

Additional requirements apply to participate in the State 4-H Horse Show. Look to the South Dakota 4-H Horse Project Show Guide for these additional guidelines.

### 4-H Rodeo Exhibitors

Voluntary participation at a YHL event each year is strongly encouraged; however, your annual safety obligations are met by attending the mandatory on-site safety orientation at each 4-H rodeo you attend.



## Youth Horse Literacy Menu of Options

**Chose one of these educational options to meet the annual YHL requirement.**

1. Attend a 4-H YHL certified event in a county. All events must include at least one safety element, common examples include:
  - Horse specific clinic on vaccination, health, care, feeding with a safety component, such as:
    - Haltering, where to stand and leading: demonstrating and practicing taking a halter on and off and assuring the proper fit, how the handler's position affects safety and how the horse reacts to different positions, and proper techniques for leading (where to hold, what to do with extra ropes, etc.).
    - Trailering: demonstrating and practicing proper loading, tying and unloading of horse(s) in different types of trailers (e.g. stock vs slant).
    - Clothing and helmets: provide examples of appropriate and inappropriate and unsafe footwear and clothing, discuss why helmets are important, especially for certain types of riding and what can happen without a helmet (videos are good for this).
    - Riding etiquette: courtesy to and maintaining safe distances from other riders in an arena, passing safety, going through pedestrian areas safety.
  - Horse specific workshop on elements of preparing for a show combined with a safety component such as those listed above.
    - Showmanship, grooming, bits, etc.

**Counties currently experiencing a 4-H staffing vacancy will usually have fewer YHL options.**

2. Attend a 4-H YHL event in another South Dakota 4-H county
3. Complete one approved online learning option (options listed below)
  - Horse Sense: Equine Youth Safety Course
    - Register at: <https://www.myhorseuniversity.com/youth-safety>
    - Watch program minimum of 1 hour of content, turn in a one page typed reflection paper of your learning outcomes and the printed certificates of completion
  - Complete Stay Safe Working with Horse Interactive Course (**for beginners or those new to the Horse Project only**)
    - View at: <https://innovativemedia.nmsu.edu/products/information/safewithhorses.html>
    - Complete all 3 chapters and turn in a one page typed reflection paper of your learning outcomes
  - AQHLearn (some have a fee)
    - View at: <https://learn.aqhuniversity.com/collections>
    - Complete one (1) level 2 or 3 course or two (2) level 1 courses and turn in certificate(s)
  - For 2026 only, the Senior level Hippology 2025 State Contest will qualify as YHL. Senior level 4-H members should have a solid understanding of horse safety by this time in their 4-H careers. The senior level Hippology contest provides a broad educational experience to supplement this.
    - Critique and review of the answers is strongly encouraged
    - Participation in the Beginner or Junior level Hippology contest does not count as a YHL.

**To learn about Youth Horse Literacy opportunities in your county and in beyond, contact your local SDSU Extension 4-H Office.**

SDSU Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer in accordance with the nondiscrimination policies of South Dakota State University, the South Dakota Board of Regents and the United States Department of Agriculture.

Learn more at [extension.sdstate.edu](https://extension.sdstate.edu).

© 2026, South Dakota Board of Regents