



Unaccompanied Youth Overview

OVERVIEW. So, you are under 18 years of age as of January 1 and you are classified as a Youth participant and must be accompanied by adult rider(s) during the competition in order to comply with Equine Distance Riding Association's Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policies.

Youth members between the ages of 14 and 17 are eligible to ride unaccompanied and are subsequently competing in the Adult Division (with a Weight Class), if the following steps are taken and only after approval is officially granted by EDRA's Vice President:

- A completed application form and letters of recommendation from past sponsors are submitted by the parent/legal guardian to the EDRA Vice President 14 or more days in advance of the desired effective date. The application must reflect and indicate:
 - The Youth has completed 500 miles or more, at comparable distance competitions of at least 50 miles in distance. (Miles from distance competitions of 50 miles or longer at EDRA endorsed events, United States Equestrian Federation licensed events, American Endurance Ride Conference sanctioned events, and Equestrian Canada sanctioned events are recognized as helping to meet this mileage requirement.) The parent/legal guardian may petition EDRA to accept miles from other sponsoring organizations through the submittal of this application, but those miles may not be accepted.)
 - The parent/legal guardian consents that the EDRA provision, requiring Youth be accompanied by an adult, need not be followed for their child and that the child will be exempt from EDRA's Minor Athlete Abuse Policies at the parent's/legal guardian's direction.
- The EDRA Vice President (VP) will review and verify the mileage information provided is accurate and is accepted as helping to meet the experience requirements.
- The EDRA VP will contact those individuals submitting letters of recommendation and/or other past sponsors to discuss the applicant's decision-making capabilities to help determine if the applicant is a viable candidate for riding solo.
- The VP will communicate approval or denial of the request to the parent/legal guardian. If approved, the VP issues an effective date that the child becomes eligible to ride unaccompanied and communicates the change in status to both the parent/legal guardian and affected EDRA volunteers.

Once granted, the child's status will be designated as Unaccompanied Youth. The child will be treated as a competitor in the Adult Division and must declare a Weight Class. The child will

remain in the Adult Division and cannot revert back to the general Youth Rider category, except in the event of disciplinary action.

Miles, points, best-in-class awards and completions achieved prior to the approval of the Unaccompanied Youth designation will be categorized in the Youth Division and miles, points, best-in-class awards and completions achieved on or after the effective date of the Unaccompanied Youth approval will be categorized in the applicable Weight Class, in the Adult Division. **Please Note: applying for Unaccompanied Youth status during the course of the ride season, may cause the child to be listed in multiple award categories and may prevent the child from being recognized to the fullest extent possible since points, miles, best-in-class awards and completions may be split between the various competition divisions.**

As part of the disciplinary process, Unaccompanied Youth status may be revoked for future competitions if the behavior or actions of the Unaccompanied Youth reflect poor judgement in the care and well-being of their equine or are in violation of other EDRA rules. Should the privilege of riding unaccompanied be revoked, the child's status will be communicated to both parent/legal guardian and affected EDRA volunteers.

Once approved, children in the Unaccompanied Youth category will be treated as an Adult competitor for Distance Rides, Relays, Best-In-Class judging, and award calculation purposes. The child is not eligible to sponsor other youth as they are a legal minor. Membership fees and other EDRA benefits and programs (e.g., EDRA in Motion and eligibility for ride entry fee discounts through the Mary & Anna Memorial Youth Fund) remain intact and the child is treated as if s/he remained in the general Youth Rider division.

By submitting an application, the child and parent/legal guardian acknowledge their understanding of award recognition and other consequences the change in status brings.

Unaccompanied Youth Frequently Asked Questions

Why would I want to apply for Unaccompanied Youth Status?

After having participated in endurance competitions for the past several years, accumulating over 500 miles in events of 50-miles or longer, you may feel you have sufficient experience to ride solo. Although you enjoy riding with a sponsor, there have been occasions where your equine was held back because of the overall slower pace of others. Perhaps you want to challenge yourself and equine. Perhaps you want to demonstrate that you are capable of managing and caring for your horse on your own. It is a significant responsibility to be the sole individual overseeing the welfare of a horse during the competition and you wish to take this step.

If approved to ride unaccompanied, you can also hook-up and ride with others, without their having to be responsible for you and your equine. This gives you the opportunity to tap into other competitors' knowledge and learn from them. That said, it is critical you demonstrate the ability to ride your own race, and to acknowledge it is your sole responsibility to ensure your equine is ridden to its capability and not that of others around you. You must make independent decisions and live with the consequences, both good and bad.

In order to take on this challenge, you must have situational awareness and closely monitor your horse's well-being. You will make independent decisions and should ensure you put the horse's well-being above your own goals, above your desire to compete or win. This is a huge commitment and responsibility, but it allows you to grow into the accomplished equestrian that you may strive to become.

What types of things should my parents and I consider when making this decision?

Do you enjoy and have experience riding by yourself? (It is likely that you will be riding in extremely remote areas where there is no cell coverage and no one will be available to help, in the event you or your horse are injured.) If you don't enjoy solo riding, you may wish to refrain from applying for Unaccompanied Youth status.

Do past sponsors feel you are ready for this step? It would be to your benefit to discuss the option with past sponsors in order to determine whether or not they feel you are ready for this responsibility. During this discussion, ask them about their observations of your ability to make judgements that are in the best interest of the equine. Are you regularly asking what steps you should take with your horse (e.g., feeding and watering and electrolyting)? If so, you may want to ride with a sponsor and practice making these important decisions without their guidance.

Recommendations from past sponsors are required to be submitted when you apply for Unaccompanied Youth status, so it is in your best interest to know what they will say in their recommendation or when interviewed during the reference-checking process.

Are you anxious about the possibility of getting lost? Do you know the best steps to take if you think you are lost? Do you know what steps you should consider taking in order to be better equipped to ride solo? (For example, prepare and carry basic survival tools – small handyman, lighter or matches, flashlight, whistle; carry your cellphone on you – so that if you and your equine become separated you may have a method to get help. Have the course downloaded on your phone so that you can use it in airplane mode, allowing you to retrace your route, returning to a familiar location. Remember that in poor cell coverage areas, your phone's battery will be quickly consumed and that texts may be able to be sent even when voice calls can't get through. Practice STOP – sit, think, observe, plan. When you're in a panic, your brain stops working. Fear affects judgment in a negative way, so STOP.)

Why would I refrain from applying for Unaccompanied Youth Status?

Before making the decision to apply for Unaccompanied Youth status, you need to reflect on what brings joy into your life. And you need to think through the potential consequences of the decision.

If you are inexperienced in wilderness situations, uncomfortable being by yourself in remote places, uneasy about making decisions about the care of your equine, riding solo may be unnerving or put you ill at ease. There's no need to rush into doing something you do not find enjoyable.

Another factor you may want to consider is the impact on potential awards. For example, in the first year of your being eligible to apply for Unaccompanied Youth status, your points, miles and completions (for award purposes) may be split into both the Youth Division and the Adult Division, which could affect your awards placings, since they would be divided between the Youth and Adult Divisions. Here is a scenario, which is likely:

- I am sixteen years old and at a ride the end of July and I will have accumulated the needed mileage requirements to be eligible to apply for the Unaccompanied Youth designation. My weight, with tack, is 175 pounds. My points, miles, and completions for the four EDRA rides in March through July will be associated with my record as a Youth Rider. My points, miles, and completions for the remaining three EDRA rides in August through October will be associated with my record as an Adult, Weight Class II participant. I may want to consider waiting to apply for Unaccompanied Youth status until after the end of the competition season so that all my points, miles and completions are in only one competition division, and I have a greater opportunity for award recognition.

What happens if I don't like being an Unaccompanied Youth?

Currently, the rules stipulate that once approved to ride unaccompanied, a child may not revert back to a sponsor-required status, unless disciplinary action is taken. As the Unaccompanied Youth designation only became available in 2023, the EDRA Board needs to hear from members on whether or not different variations are warranted – perhaps allowing youth to revert back to Youth status, after the close of a competition season should be allowed. The feature was not considered, nor is it currently offered, so if desired, members need to provide feedback to the Board. Parents and children wanting this flexibility may contact Rules Review task force members with their feedback on improvements that should be considered and because a change to the rules is not guaranteed, the parents and child should decide carefully on whether or not to pursue the designation.

What happens to my miles, points, and completions in the year in which my status changes from Youth to Unaccompanied Youth?

In the first year of your being eligible to apply for Unaccompanied Youth status, your points, miles, and completions (for award purposes) may be split into both the Youth Division and the Adult Division, which could affect your awards placings, since they would be divided between the Youth and Adult Divisions. An example of what might happen is provided:

- I am sixteen years old and at a ride the end of July and I will have accumulated the needed mileage requirements to be eligible to apply for the Unaccompanied Youth designation. My weight, with tack, is 175 pounds. My points, miles, and completions

for the four EDRA rides in March through July will be associated with my record as a Youth Rider. My points, miles, and completions for the remaining three EDRA rides in August through October will be associated with my record as an Adult, Weight Class II participant. I may want to consider waiting to apply for Unaccompanied Youth status until after the end of the competition season so that all my points, miles and completions are in only one competition division, and I have a greater opportunity for award recognition.

If I'm approved as an Unaccompanied Youth, can I sponsor other Youth Riders?

No. In order to meet the criteria of EDRA's Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policies, a sponsor must be age 18 or older and have successfully completed SafeSport training. More information on SafeSport requirements can be found at <https://safesporttrained.org/#/public-dashboard>

Ready to apply?

Click the appropriate button and you'll be directed to:

LINK TO INSTRUCTIONS

LINK TO APPLICATION FORM