

Driving in Severe Weather

Helping you steer clear
of trouble



www.highways.gov.uk/winter

Stay safe in severe weather

Wind and rain, ice and snow – winter can throw the very worst weather at us. To help you to prepare for bad weather here is some helpful advice for your journey, from the Highways Agency.



When freezing temperatures are forecast, the winter fleet will be out treating the roads with salt. The fleet includes new spreading vehicles which distribute the salt with less waste. During severe winter weather it is a round-the-clock operation to reduce the effects of ice and snow.

Whilst we do everything we can to make your journey easier, there are lots of things you can do, such as:

- Checking the route for delays and poor weather conditions before you set out.
- Planning your journey if you need to travel in severe weather.
- Keeping an emergency kit in your vehicle (see page 5).

When you are on the road:



- Pay attention to the changing road, traffic and weather conditions.
- Look out for Variable Message Signs (electronic overhead signs) warning of conditions ahead.
- Be ready to slow down and take more care if you need to, particularly when approaching a bend and on exposed stretches of road.

You can use the Highways Agency's information services to check and plan your journey, visit www.highways.gov.uk/traffic or call 0300 123 5000.



Winter journey checklist



You should pay extra attention to planning your journey in severe weather.

Before you travel, ask yourself these questions:

- Do I really need to travel now or can my journey wait until the weather improves?
- Should I plan an alternative route for my journey?
- Have I checked my route for delays and poor weather conditions?
- Is my car ready for the journey?
- Have I packed an emergency kit?
- Will I need to change my driving style to suit the conditions?

During your journey remember this critical question:

- If I had to brake suddenly in an emergency, could I stop safely within the distance I can clearly see ahead of me?

1. Get your vehicle ready for winter



- Service your vehicle.
- Check and replace the anti-freeze in the radiator.
- If the battery is not reliable, replace it. Most batteries last between two and four years.
- Lights can get dirty. Keep them clean and check the bulbs often so you are ready for lower visibility.
- Check your tyres are correctly inflated to the manufacturer's recommended pressure for your vehicle and its load.
- Replace tyres before the tread has reached the legal minimum of 1.6mm.
- Keep your windscreen clean and replace worn wiper blades.
- Before driving, make sure your windows are clear of mist, ice and snow, inside and out.

2. Emergency kits are essential



Keep an emergency kit in the car, including:

- ✓ Ice scraper and de-icer
- ✓ Torch
- ✓ Warm clothes and a blanket
- ✓ A pair of boots
- ✓ First-aid kit
- ✓ Battery jump leads
- ✓ A shovel for snow
- ✓ Food and a warm drink in a flask
- ✓ Sunglasses to help you see in low winter sun
- ✓ A fully charged mobile phone and charger, in case a roadside phone is not available



3. Be aware of changing road and weather conditions



If it is foggy, raining, snowing or icy, make sure you slow down and keep well back from the vehicle in front of you. Many collisions are caused through not braking in time when the roads are wet or slippery; allow sufficient distance between you and the vehicle in front.

Watch out for locations where you may need to drive more carefully, either because of side winds or a greater risk of ice. Look out for:

- Changes in road elevation or exposure.
- Where the road passes under or over a bridge, or where traffic is lighter (e.g. slip roads).
- Bends in the road where there is a greater risk of losing control. Reduce your speed when approaching a bend and do not brake suddenly.

Driving through ice and snow

- Clear any snow off the roof of the vehicle before you drive away.
- Watch out for icy conditions - look for clues such as ice on the pavement or on your windscreen before you start your journey and take extra care.



- Try not to brake suddenly – it may lock up your wheels and you could skid further.
- Look out for winter service vehicles spreading salt or using snow ploughs. They have flashing amber beacons and travel at slower speeds – around 40mph. Stay well back because salt or spray can be thrown across the road. Do not overtake unless it is safe to do so – there may be uncleared snow on the road ahead.

Driving in rain and floods

- When the road is wet it can take twice as long to stop. Slow down and maintain a safe distance from the vehicle in front.
- If your vehicle loses grip, or “aquaplanes”, on surface water take your foot off the accelerator to slow down. Do not brake or steer suddenly because you have less control of the steering and brakes.
- Try to avoid driving through surface water as you might flood your engine.



- If you have to drive through floods, drive slowly, use a low gear and try to keep the engine revving at a high rate. Move forward continuously to avoid stalling the engine. When driving an automatic vehicle, engage and hold in a low gear.
- Test your brakes after driving through water; they may be ineffective.

Driving in fog

- Use dipped headlights so that other drivers can see you.
- If it is foggy (less than 100m visibility) then switch on your fog lights. Do not forget to turn them off when conditions improve.
- Fog is often patchy so try not to speed up as visibility improves. You could suddenly find yourself back in thick fog further up the road.



Driving in windy weather

- Take extra care on the roads and plan your journey by checking the latest weather conditions.
- Though high-sided vehicles are particularly affected by windy weather, strong winds can also blow other vehicles off course. This can happen on open stretches of road exposed to strong crosswinds, or when passing bridges, high-sided vehicles or gaps in trees.

4. If you break down on the motorway



- Pull onto the hard shoulder, park as far over to the left as you can, away from traffic, and turn on your hazard warning lights.
- Get yourself and any passengers out of the vehicle immediately, using the doors on the left hand side, furthest from the traffic.
- While you wait for help, keep well away from the carriageway and the hard shoulder. Stand behind the barrier if it is safe to do so, and wrap up warm. Do not try even the simplest of repairs.
- Try to use the emergency roadside telephones rather than a mobile phone. This will help to alert traffic officers and emergency services to your exact location.



5. More information to help you on your journey

You can get all the latest information on road conditions on England's motorways and trunk roads:

- Visit the Highways Agency website: www.highways.gov.uk/traffic
- Call the Highways Agency Information Line (HAIL): **0300 123 5000***
- Download the Highways Agency iPhone app or access the mobile website www.highways.gov.uk/mobile
- For information on weather conditions, consult the Met Office: www.metoffice.gov.uk or listen to local radio broadcasts
- For further information on driving in bad weather see The Highway Code: www.direct.gov.uk/motoring

*Calls from landlines to 0300 numbers can cost up to 8p per minute but are free from some landline providers; mobiles usually cost more. Please check costs with your service provider.



This guide has been written to help you stay safe on the roads this winter. It includes advice from the Highways Agency and the Met Office and is supported by the Driving Standards Agency, the THINK! Campaign and the Institute of Advanced Motorists.



If you need help using this or any other Highways Agency information, please call **0300 123 5000** and we will assist you.

Safety at roadworks



The Highways Agency is working with the industry and road users to reduce the risks of working on the roads.

For the safety of roadworkers and all road users, when you are approaching roadworks:

- Keep within the speed limit – it is there for your safety.
- Get into the correct lane in good time – don't keep switching.
- Concentrate on the road ahead, not the roadworks.
- Be alert for works traffic leaving or entering roadworks.
- Keep a safe distance – there could be queues in front.
- Observe all signs – they are there to help you.

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