



Winter Defensive Driving Tips for the Whole Family

12 COMMENTS · SABINA GREEN

You may have made it safely past your holiday road trip, but winter driving for the sake of daily errands, activities and pickups are dangerous, too. Backroads aren't always as well-maintained as main roads, and it's easy to get lax about driving when you're in your own familiar hometown.



Winter weather brings with it fog, freezing rain, snow and sleet, and just because the holidays are behind us, that doesn't mean the bad weather is too. The winter season doesn't technically start until December 21, and it runs all the way through March 20.

The following winter defensive driving tips will help you and everyone in the family stay as safe as possible.

Guidelines for Everyone

The following guidelines apply to every type of driver, from newbies to parents of little ones, to the elderly:

- When the weather is nasty, it's tempting to look at what's happening directly in front of you. It's safer to look farther down the road, though, so that you have extra time to respond to what's coming.
- Don't try to get up to the speed limit if conditions are bad. The speed limit is the maximum amount of speed you can drive in *good*. In the winter when conditions are less than perfect, it's better to go slower. "Go slower" is a great all-around [rule for winter driving](#) too. Everything should be done more slowly, from driving straight to taking turns and braking.
- Start braking early on icy or wet roads. Your car will take a longer time to stop in slick conditions. If you slam on your brakes, your car could skid and you could lose control, even if you have anti-lock brakes or stability control.
- When trying to get up a hill during the winter, your first idea will be to floor it in order to cut through the wintry conditions. This can make your wheels spin, though, which will work against you. Instead, gain momentum when you're still on flat ground, then let that carry you up the hill as you accelerate normally. Reduce your speed as you near the top, then go down the hill as slowly as you can.

Parents (or Any Caretaker) With Little Ones

Parents of little ones, or anybody who's going to have kids in their car, from aunts and uncles to babysitters and nannies, should know the following winter driving tips:

- If you have a new car that you haven't driven in the winter yet, get used to it without the kids in the car. Head to an empty parking lot in the early morning or evening, when there aren't many other cars around, to practice.
- Don't bundle up children before buckling them in. Yes, you want them to be warm when the weather is cold, but all that bulk shouldn't be *under* their car seat harness or seat belt because it will make the harness too loose should you get into a crash. Instead, remove the child's coat, buckle them in and then tuck a blanket over them or put their coat on backwards.

Grandparents and Elderly Drivers

Older drivers have to balance their current health conditions with driving safety. Here are a couple of tips for your family's older generation:

- If you're starting to feel like the older members of your family just don't drive the way they used to, start a conversation about sharing driving duties and more, especially if they regularly pick your kids up from school or drive them to appointments.
- For grandparents or elderly members of your family who have declining eyesight, encourage them to only drive during the daytime. Visibility goes down around dusk, making it harder to see winter hazards. Once the sun's gone down, it's best for older drivers to ask a friend or family member for a ride.
- People over the age of 50 may struggle with dry eye, which can impact driving safety. Lubricating drops, swapping contact lenses for glasses or wearing sunglasses are just a few of the ways to treat dry eye.

Teenagers and First-Time Winter Drivers

Teens and inexperienced drivers are used to the reliable grip of clear roads, which leaves them unprepared for the slippery conditions they're about to encounter.

- [Teens should know](#) not to take off before their car is cleared of snow and ice or before it's warmed up enough to defog the windshield. Driving away too early can mean poor visibility through the windshield, which is extremely dangerous. Consider having a remote starter installed — they can start the car from inside the house and let it warm up for a couple of minutes before getting in.
- Go out with your teen the first few times they drive in the winter. If they're hesitant to have mum or dad in the car, make it fun — tell them you're going shopping or out for lunch so that it doesn't feel like strictly a lesson.
- Encourage them to not use their phone while driving. While this is a good rule of thumb throughout the rest of the year, it's even more important during the winter, when slick roads make reaction time that much more important. The DMV has a [list of apps](#) that help combat distracted driving.
- A smartphone isn't the only thing that can cause distractions. Marijuana use before driving is a major problem. Since many teens don't understand the [risks of driving after using marijuana](#), educate them before you hand over the keys.

One More Thought

As the winter turns into spring, you still have to keep an eye out for ice. Warmer air and more sunshine don't mean that winter road hazards are automatically gone, and even minor accidents can have [major consequences](#). Continue driving defensively as you do during the winter until you're well into the spring.

