

# Driving safety tips every driver should know



When you're behind the wheel of a car – whether alone or with passengers – driving safely should always be your top concern. We're more distracted than ever, so it's crucial to know the basics of safe driving and practice them every time you're on the road. Here are some safe driving tips:

## Top 4 driving safety tips

### Focus on driving

- Keep 100% of your attention on driving at all times – no multi-tasking.
- Don't use your phone or any other electronic device while driving.
- Slow down. Speeding gives you less time to react and increases the severity of an accident.

### Drive “defensively”

- Be aware of what other drivers around you are doing, and expect the unexpected.
- Assume other motorists will do something crazy, and always be prepared to avoid it.
- Keep a 2-second cushion between you and the car in front of you.
- Make that 4 seconds if the weather is bad.

### Make a safe driving plan

- Build time into your trip schedule to stop for food, rest breaks, phone calls or other business.
- Adjust your seat, mirrors and climate controls before putting the car in gear.
- Pull over to eat or drink. It takes only a few minutes.

## **Practice safety**

- Secure cargo that may move around while the vehicle is in motion.
- Don't attempt to retrieve items that fall to the floor.
- Have items needed within easy reach – such as toll fees, toll cards and garage passes.
- Always wear your seat belt and drive sober and drug-free.

## **More driving safety tips from Nationwide**

- Don't allow children to fight or climb around in your car – they should be buckled in their seats at all times. Too much noise can easily distract you from focus on the road.
- Avoid driving when you're tired. Be aware that some medications cause drowsiness and make operating a vehicle very dangerous. Learn more about [drowsy driving](#).
- Always use caution when changing lanes. Cutting in front of someone, changing lanes too fast or not using your signals may cause an accident or upset other drivers.
- Be extra careful while [driving during deer season](#).

## **Common sense about safe driving**

### **What to do after an accident**

If you're in an accident, first make sure no one in the car is injured. Next, check on the passengers in the other vehicle, pedestrians and anyone else nearby to make sure they're OK. Then do these five things:

#### **Stay at the scene**

Leaving can result in legal consequences, like fines or additional violations.

#### **Call 911 or the local police immediately**

They'll dispatch an officer and medical personnel to the scene of the accident. Once the cops arrive, wait for them to complete an accident report.

#### **Stay in the car**

If you're on a busy highway, stay inside the car and wait for the police or an ambulance. It's dangerous if passengers stand along a freeway or other road with lots of traffic.

#### **Stay calm**

Don't get into an argument or a fight with the other driver. Simply exchange contact and insurance information. If possible, also get the name and phone numbers of witnesses.

#### **Contact your insurance provider**

Call your insurance provider to report the claim. Your agent will ask you for any paperwork you receive about the accident, and will give you important information on getting your car fixed.

Find out more about [what to do after an accident](#) or [a hit-and-run](#).

## **What to do when pulled over**

If you notice that a police car is following you with the lights flashing, pull over to the side of the road safely and quickly. Wait inside your car for the officer to approach, and be prepared to:

### **Turn on the light**

Turn on your interior light at night and keep your hands where the officer can see them, preferably on the steering wheel.

### **Keep your hands visible**

Don't reach under your seat or into your glove box. This may cause the officer to think you're reaching for a weapon or hiding something.

### **Provide necessary documentation**

Give your license and proof of insurance to the officer if asked. If the officer asks you to step out of your car, do so without sudden or threatening movements.

### **Be polite**

Stay calm – don't become argumentative, disorderly or abusive – and never attempt to bribe the officer.

If a citation is issued, present your story in traffic court if you feel you've been unfairly treated. You may be represented by a lawyer and, if necessary, you'll be heard by a judge or magistrate.

## **Things to know about speeding & traffic laws**

Some roadways are designated as low-speed zones. These include areas with high pedestrian traffic, such as school zones and streets lots of intersections close together. Driving over the speed limit can put you and others at risk of harm.

1. Never pass a stopped bus displaying a stop sign to its left. That means children are crossing the street.
2. If you hear a siren coming behind you, pull to the side if you can, stop and wait until the police car or fire truck goes by.
3. Completely stop at stop signs and look for other drivers and pedestrians before you proceed.

4. Obey the posted speed limit at all times. Speeding tickets are costly, and penalties for speeding can include fines, court appearances and loss or suspension of your driving privileges. Also, depending on your insurance policy, speeding tickets can raise your rates.
5. When parking your vehicle, always be mindful of handicapped signs, fire hydrants, bus stop zones, parking restrictions for certain times of day, and parking spots that require permits. Just remember to heed all of the signs. Even if you have to circle the block a couple times, it sure beats getting fined or having your car towed.

## **All about DUI & DWI**

Driving after drinking too much alcohol is known as Driving Under the Influence (DUI) or Driving While Intoxicated (DWI). Alcohol slows your reflexing, temporarily lowers your mental acuity and can thus compromise your ability to control a vehicle and drive it safely. And yes, even "buzzed driving" is still drunk driving and can be just as dangerous.

A DUI arrest can lead to expensive consequences, including spending time in jail, a suspended driver's license and fines. If you hit and/or kill someone while you are driving impaired, the consequences are even worse.

It's also illegal to have an open container of alcohol in your car. If you're transporting alcoholic beverages, they should be sealed and in the trunk.

All 50 states have now set .08% Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) as the legal limit for Driving Under the Influence, according to the [Insurance Institute for Highway Safety \(IIHS\)](#). For commercial drivers, it's .04%. And if you're under 21, it's zero tolerance – any amount of alcohol is grounds for a DUI arrest.

In some cities, law enforcement officials set up sobriety checkpoints along the road to identify and deter impaired drivers. These are typically set up during holiday weekends or on dates when there might be more drinking and driving.

If you're stopped at a checkpoint, you'll be asked several questions and might be asked to perform a sobriety test (like saying the ABC's backwards, performing some physical movements or breathing into an alcohol sensor). If these tests show that you have high alcohol levels, the police may arrest you.

## **Winter driving tips**

Winter brings all sorts of driving headaches: snow, freezing rain and slush, which all make the roads more hazardous. To handle the hassle of winter driving:

1. First of all, buckle up. Basic car safety encourages the use of seat belts and car seats at all times. They're one of your best defenses in a crash. And it's the law.
2. Use extra caution in areas that ice up quickly, especially intersections, shaded areas, bridges and overpasses.

3. Get in the habit of regularly checking weather reports on TV or online so you can prepare for bad weather. On severe weather days, schools and workplaces might close or delay opening. Consider staying at home if you don't need to be on the road.
4. Keep an emergency kit in the trunk of your car – including blankets, a first aid kit and jumper cables. Check out our full list of items for your [emergency car kit](#).
5. Make sure your cell phone is fully charged and that your car always has a full tank of gas.

To ensure you always have someone on your side when it comes to keeping you and your vehicle safe, learn more about auto insurance from Nationwide.