

Driving – 10 Tips For Winter Driving

Dr. William Heegaard knows what's coming after this year's first snowfall: more business for the emergency room at Hennepin County Medical Center in Minneapolis. "It's almost like everyone forgets how to drive when the snow hits again," says Heegaard, a doctor in the emergency medicine department. "People forget they have to cut their speed in half to be safe."

To keep those emergency rooms less busy this winter, follow these 10 tips for safe winter driving.

- **Respect the winter weather.** Plan extra time for a trip in the winter. A trip that might take 30 minutes in May might take you 45 minutes or an hour in the winter."
- **Wear your safety belts.** You have to be protected, no matter what season it is," says the National Safety Council's Safety Belt Coalition. Make it a rule: Everyone must be buckled up before the vehicle moves.
- **Don't drink and drive.** You have less reaction time in hazardous conditions.
- **Winterize your vehicle's safety kit.** The kit should include some special additions, such as a blanket, a small shovel to dig out snow, sand to help get traction if needed, a flashlight, a first-aid kit, jumper cables, ice scraper/brush and lock deicer.
- **Conduct a pre-trip inspection.** Check the antifreeze. Make sure you have proper tires to handle the weather. Be sure you have enough gas for each trip. Wipers must be in good shape to handle snow and ice. Remember to first un-stick them from the frozen glass.
- **Be ready for changing conditions.** Make sure you have good all-season tires that can handle different types of weather. Check with your auto mechanic or a professional at a tire store to discuss your options. In high snow and ice areas, you may need more than all-season tires.
- **Don't get SUV overconfidence.** "The bigger the vehicle, the tougher it is to stop," says Liz Neblett of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. While a sport-utility vehicle might get through some tough conditions more easily, it won't stop more quickly, and it may roll over if you make a turn too fast.
- **Know how to react to trouble.** If you have antilock brakes, don't pump them. Press them down as hard as you can. If you go into a skid, turn the steering wheel in the direction you want the front of the car to go; that will keep the vehicle from skidding out of control. Then prepare to counter steer 2 or 3 times.
- **Leave some space.** Follow the 3-second rule. After the vehicle in front of you passes a stationary object, you should be able to count for 3 seconds before your vehicle passes the same object. Add 1 more second for each driving condition that deteriorates.
- **Defuse road rage.** One-fourth of drivers in a recent AAA survey admitted they have expressed anger at other drivers. Leave more room between yourself and other drivers. Stay out of the left lane if you're going slow. And don't play games on the road.