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# Driving in Bad Weather



## Introduction

There are lots of simple things that you can do to make your journey safer and less stressful during severe weather such as checking your route for delays before you set out, taking an alternative route if you need to, taking an emergency kit and adapting your driving style to the conditions.

When freezing temperatures are forecast, you'll see our winter fleet out and about treating the roads with salt. Despite the high level of service provided, sudden weather changes occur and motorists should be aware that access to the network may not always be possible.

For up-to-the-minute information on roadworks, accidents, congestion, journey times and weather affecting the trunk road network, visit [www.trafficscotland.org](http://www.trafficscotland.org). For other roads, check with the relevant local authority.

The web service is also available on mobile phones and similar devices which have internet access. You can also access information by calling the Traffic Customer Care Line on **0800 028 1414**.

## Before your journey

You should pay extra attention to planning your journey in bad weather. Before travelling you should:

- check the weather forecast and road conditions.
- consider whether you need to travel right now or if you can wait until the weather improves?
- consider alternative routes
- consider alternative modes of transport.
- allow extra time for your journey
- ensure that your vehicle is ready for a journey in poor weather
- do I have an emergency kit?
- consider whether you need to change your driving style to suit the weather or conditions?
- tell someone at your destination what time you expect to arrive
- visit the Traffic Scotland website below to identify any problems on trunk roads

[www.trafficscotland.org](http://www.trafficscotland.org)

## Before you drive

It is important to check that your vehicle is well maintained and serviced. You should:

- if the battery is not reliable – replace it. Most batteries last between two and four years
- check that tyres have plenty of tread depth and are maintained at the correct pressure
- lights can get filthy with spray, keep them clean and check the bulbs often
- keep your windscreen clean. Dirty windows and mirrors can make it hard to see in low winter sun. Replace worn wiper blades
- add anti-freeze to the radiator and winter additive to the windscreen washer bottles.
- before driving off, make sure your windows, lights and mirrors are clear of mist, ice and snow, inside and out



### Emergency kits are essential

Keep an emergency kit in the car:

- ice scraper and de-icer
- torch and spare batteries
- 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 in the glove box to help you see in low winter sun
- make sure your mobile phone is charged fully in case a roadside phone is not available
- finally, a map for any unplanned diversions





## During your journey

Be aware of changing road and weather conditions – even if it is a road you use regularly. Don not be lulled into a false sense of security – even if you drive every day on the same stretch of road.

You may need to change the way you drive:

- reduce speed in bad weather
- increase stopping distances
- avoid sudden acceleration and braking
- use dipped headlights in poor conditions
- take breaks every 2 or 3 hours
- do not pass closed snow gates
- listen to radio travel bulletins
- observe information on Variable Message Signs

Watch out for locations where you may need to drive more carefully. Some common examples are:

- changes in road elevation or exposure
- where the road passes under or over a bridge.
- things at the side of the road that shade the carriageway (e.g. trees, bridges, or other structures)
- where there is less traffic use (e.g. slip roads).
- bends in the road where there is a greater risk of loss of control. Reduce your speed when approaching



### 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?

## Driving through ice and snow

- your stopping distance is increased ten times when driving in snow and ice
- select second gear when pulling away, easing your foot off the clutch gently to avoid wheel-spin
- it is not always obvious that the road is icy. Look for clues such as ice on the pavement or on your windscreen. If your tyres are making virtually no noise on the road it could be a sign that you are driving on ice
- do not brake - it will just lock up your wheels and you will skid further
- clear any snow on the roof of the vehicle before you drive off. It can slip down over the windscreen and obscure your view
- in severe cold or snowy conditions, look out for winter service vehicles spreading salt or using snow ploughs. They will have flashing amber beacons and will be travelling at slower speeds – around 40mph. Stay well back because salt or spray is thrown across the road. Don't overtake unless it is safe to do so – there may be uncleared snow on the road ahead

## Driving in the rain

- when the road's wet, it can take twice as long to stop. So it makes sense to slow down and maintain a safe distance from the vehicle in front
- if your vehicle loses its grip, or "aquaplanes" on surface water take your foot off the accelerator to slow down. Do not brake or steer suddenly because you have no control of the steering or brakes

## Floods

- try to avoid driving through surface water as you might flood your engine. Avoid the deepest water which is usually nearest the kerb
- if you have to drive through floods, drive slowly, using first gear and try to keep the engine revving at a high rate. Move forward continuously to avoid stalling the engine. In driving an automatic vehicle engage and hold in a low gear
- test your brakes after driving through water; they may be ineffective

## Driving in windy weather

- take extra care on the roads and plan your journeys by checking the latest weather conditions
- high-sided vehicles are particularly affected by windy weather but strong gusts can also blow a vehicle, cyclist, motorcyclist, or horse rider 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

## Driving with a low sun

- dazzle from winter sun can be dangerous. Keep a pair of sunglasses (prescription if needed) in the vehicle all year round and make sure you keep your windscreen clean. Wear your sunglasses in bright sunshine, especially if the sun is low or reflecting off a wet road

## Driving in fog

- drive very slowly using dipped headlights so other drivers can see you
- if it is really foggy (less than 100m visibility), then switch your fog lights and rear high intensity lights on. Remember to switch them off when visibility improves
- do not hang on to the tail-lights of the vehicle in front. This gives you a false sense of security and means you may be driving too close
- 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

## Darker evenings and mornings

- switch on lights as soon as it starts to get dark
- in urban areas use dipped beam. Use full beam on other roads at night but dip them when there is someone in front or coming towards you
- be aware that pedestrians are harder to spot in the dark and may not be visible until they are very close. In particular, take care when driving near schools and homes, where children may be walking and cycling. These types of road user are very vulnerable as they are both hard to spot in the dark and may act unpredictably. Slow right down to 20mph. If you hit someone at this speed they have more than a nine in ten chance of survival, compared with about a 50/50 chance at 30mph