

Driving in adverse weather

Driving in adverse weather conditions requires additional care and extra preparation to avoid and deal with potential emergencies.

In poor weather, consider cancelling or postponing any non-essential journeys by vehicle.

If you're required to drive in adverse weather conditions, allow extra time to ensure that your vehicle is adequately prepared... Consult your vehicle's owner's manual for specific tips on driving your vehicle in poor weather conditions. If you're driving for work in adverse conditions you should ensure that your line manager is aware of your journey details such as the origin, destination and expected journey time. Make contact with your line manager when you safely arrive at your intended destination.

The guidance notes below are intended to help you prepare for journeys in adverse weather conditions.

Route and weather updates

It is recommended that you always check your route before you set out. Check the real-time traffic information provided for your routes.

The latest information on road conditions on UK motorways and trunk roads is available from the UK Highways Agency website at [highways.gov.uk/](https://www.highways.gov.uk/) or on 08457 50 40 20. This information is available in Ireland through the Irish National Roads Authority website ([nra.ie](https://www.nra.ie)) or via phone on +353 1 6602511.

Traffic Radio is available on digital radio or on local radio bulletins. Information on weather conditions is available from the UK Met Office [metoffice.gov.uk](https://www.metoffice.gov.uk) or the Irish National Meteorological Service [met.ie](https://www.met.ie). Information on flooding can be obtained from the Environment Agency ([environment-agency.gov.uk](https://www.environment-agency.gov.uk)).

Vehicle preparation

Vehicles should always be regularly inspected, serviced and maintained in good working order. During periods of adverse weather, particular attention should be given to the following:

- Car batteries last approximately five years, and the extra demand placed on them during adverse weather from the use of heaters, lights and wipers can decrease their lifespan.
- Check the tyre pressures in accordance with the manufacturer's specifications.
- Check the tyre treads depths. For winter driving it is recommended to have 3mm of tread and certainly not less than 2mm.
- Ensure that there is an adequate amount of anti-freeze, at the correct concentration in both the radiator and windscreen washer bottle.
- Keep lights clean and check bulbs regularly so you'll be prepared for lower visibility and shorter days.
- Make sure wiper blades aren't worn and the vehicle has sufficient windscreen washer fluid in the reservoir so you can keep your windscreen as clean as possible.
- Dirty windows and mirrors can make it hard to see as the low winter sun hits. Make sure they are kept clean and free of ice and snow in colder weather. Ensure windows are clear and de-misted before setting off.
- Clear any snow from the roof of your vehicle before setting off.
- Make sure you have sufficient fuel in the tank for your journey, taking into account you may have to make unplanned diversions.
- Finally, take a map or satellite navigation device.

Emergency equipment

An emergency situation on the road can arise at any time and you must be prepared. In addition to making sure your vehicle is well prepared, it is recommended you should consider carrying the following items in your vehicle:

- Means of changing a tyre, e.g. inflated spare tyre, wheel wrench and functional jack.

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- Shovel.
- Fully charged mobile phone and in-car phone charger.
- Tool kit.
- Ice scraper, de-icer and snow brush.
- Fully charged torch and extra batteries.
- Some warm clothes, woollen hat and gloves and a woollen blanket or sleeping bag.
- A pair of boots with deep treads.
- First-aid kit.
- Battery jump leads.
- Some food and a warm drink – in a flask for particularly cold weather.
- It is also worth keeping a pair of sunglasses in the glove compartment to protect from the glare from the low winter sun.
- A reflective triangle.

Driving in snow or ice

Snow and ice are common weather conditions in many parts of the country. When freezing temperatures are expected along your route, be prepared for snow and ice. In areas where snow and ice are uncommon, be especially cautious of motorists who may not have experience driving under these conditions.

- Reduce your speed.
- Your stopping distance will significantly increase. Leave sufficient space between you and the vehicle in front. You may need up to TEN TIMES the normal distance for braking.
- Reduce your speed in plenty of time before reaching a bend or road junction.
- Avoid harsh braking and acceleration, or sharp steering.
- Brake gently to avoid skidding. If your wheels start to lock up, ease off the brake.
- Using low gears will help you keep traction, especially on hills. Higher gears can be used for better overall control.
- Road surfaces will not be uniformly affected by adverse weather. Be prepared for isolated patches of frost or ice after most of the road has thawed – this commonly occurs under bridges.
- Do not use cruise control on icy roads.
- Visibility will probably be reduced, so use dipped headlights.
- In snow, stop frequently to clean the windows, wheel arches, lights and number plates.
- Do not pass snow ploughs and gritting vehicles. The drivers have limited visibility and you are likely to find the road in front of them worse than the road behind.
- In some areas snow chains may be required. Before travelling into these areas make sure you have the required chains and that they are in proper working condition.
- Do not assume your vehicle can handle all conditions. Even four-wheel and front-wheel drive vehicles can encounter trouble on winter roads.
- If your vehicle skids depress the clutch and turn the steering wheel into the direction of the skid. When the vehicle straightens, steer along the road. Do not brake – it will just lock up your wheels and you will skid further.

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Rear wheel skids

When driving in icy or slippery conditions and your vehicle begins a rear wheel skid you should apply the following techniques:

- Take your foot off the accelerator and apply the clutch, if you are driving a manual car.
- Steer into the direction you want the front wheels to go. If your rear wheels are sliding left, steer left. If they are sliding right, steer right.
- If your rear wheels start sliding the other way as you recover, ease the steering wheel toward that side. You might have to steer left and right a few times to get your vehicle completely under control.
- If you are forced to brake and have standard brakes, pump them gently.
- If you are forced to brake and have anti-lock brakes (ABS), do not pump the brakes. Apply steady pressure to the brakes. You will feel the brakes pulse – this is normal.

Front wheel skids

When driving in icy or slippery conditions and your vehicle begins a front wheel skid you should apply the following techniques:

- Take your foot off the accelerator and depress the clutch, but do not try to steer immediately.
- Depress the clutch. Do not brake.
- Turn the steering wheel into the direction of the skid.
- When the vehicle straightens, steer along the road releasing the clutch and applying the accelerator gently.

If your vehicle becomes stuck

- Do not spin your wheels. This will only dig your vehicle in deeper.
- Turn the wheels from side to side a few times to push snow out of the way.
- Use a light touch on the accelerator to ease your vehicle out.
- Use a shovel to clear snow away from the wheels and the underside of the car.
- If available, pour sand, cat litter, gravel or salt in the path of the wheels, to help get traction.
- Try rocking the vehicle (check your owner's manual first - this can damage the transmission on some vehicles.) Shift from forward to reverse and back again. Each time you're in gear, give a light touch on the accelerator until the vehicle gets going.

If you become stranded in your vehicle

- Do not leave your car unless you know exactly where you are, how far it is to possible help, and are certain you will improve your situation.
- To attract attention apply your hazard lights.
- If you're sure the car's exhaust pipe is not blocked, run the engine and heater for about 10 minutes every hour or so, depending upon the amount of fuel in the tank.
- To protect you from frostbite and hypothermia use the woollen items and blankets to keep warm.
- Keep at least one window open slightly. Heavy snow and ice can seal a car shut.
- Eat and drink food carried in vehicle.

Driving in rain

Rain is the most common adverse weather condition. Despite this, drivers often overlook the hazards of driving in rain.

- Reduce your speed.

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- Watch for pooling water on the road, trying to safely avoid it if you can.
- Even light rain will reduce your visibility, so use dipped headlights.
- First rain, especially after a period of dry weather, will make the roads particularly slippery.
- If the rain becomes too heavy, stop in a safe place.
- Your stopping distance will increase. Leave sufficient space between you and the vehicle in front. You may need up to TWICE the normal distance for braking.
- Try to drive in the tyre tracks left by the cars in front of you.

Aquaplaning

When the tyre tread cannot channel away enough water, the tyre(s) lose contact with the road as a thin layer of water is present between the tyres and the road surface. This is called aquaplaning. Most importantly, aquaplaning can be avoided by reducing your speed in wet conditions. Also, make sure the tyres are correctly inflated and have sufficient tread depth.

If you find yourself aquaplaning, do not brake or turn suddenly as this can cause your vehicle to skid. Ease your foot off the accelerator until the vehicle slows and you can feel the road again. If you need to brake, do so gently with light pumping actions. If your car has ABS, then brake normally; the car's computer will mimic a pumping action, when necessary.

Flooding

Some areas are more prone to flooding than others and the frequency of flooding seems to be increasing in the UK. Floods can occur for a number of reasons; for example, when rivers burst their banks, after a period of heavy rainfall, large volumes of water causing flash floods, or floods in urban areas where the sewers and drains can't cope and there is nowhere for the water to soak away. If you have to travel by vehicle during flood situations, consider the following:

- Don't attempt to drive through flood water if it seems too deep.
- Don't attempt to drive through fast flowing water.
- If you don't know the depth of the water, find an alternative route.
- If you decide to drive through flood water, stay away from the deepest sections. This is normally by the kerb.
- If you decide to drive through flood water, drive slowly to avoid creating a large bow wave.
- Drive in first or second gear; slipping the clutch and revving the engine will help to keep the exhaust clear and keep the engine running if water splashes onto the electrics. In an automatic keep your foot on the accelerator in the lowest held gear and use the brake to control your speed.
- Consider other drivers – pass through flooded sections one vehicle at a time, don't drive through water against approaching vehicles.
- After driving through standing water test your brakes.

If you're driving and become stuck in flood water, it's generally best to stay in the car and telephone for help rather than try to get out – unless the water is shallow, stationary and you can see the ground beneath the water.

Driving in fog or smoke

Driving in fog or through thick smoke can be extremely hazardous. Consider cancelling or postponing any non-essential journeys by vehicle when foggy conditions prevail. If you have to drive in fog or through thick smoke, consider the following:

- Allow extra time for your journey.
- Make sure your vehicle is well prepared and that everything is in good working order.

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- Use dipped headlights at all times. According to the Highway Code, you must use headlights when visibility is seriously reduced – generally when you cannot see for more than 100 metres (328 feet).
- Familiarise yourself with your front and rear fog lights. Know how to switch them on and off and use them when appropriate.
- Reduce your speed appropriate to the prevailing conditions.
- Maintain a greater distance between you and the car in front to allow sufficient braking time.
- At a junction with limited visibility, stop, wind down the window, and listen for traffic. When you are sure it is safe to emerge, do so positively and do not hesitate in a position that puts you directly in the path of approaching vehicles.

Driving in strong winds

Strong winds can create driving hazards especially for high-profile vehicles, such as tractor-trailers, buses and large delivery vehicles. The weight and configuration of the vehicle will determine how it will be affected by wind. Light, high-profile vehicles are likely to be affected more readily than heavier, low-profile vehicles. When driving during strong winds:

- Allow extra time for your journey.
- Be aware of other motorists who may have difficulties staying in their lane.
- When overtaking a high-profile vehicle on a dual carriageway or motorway, before passing make sure the road ahead of you is clear to avoid sitting alongside the high-profile vehicle and becoming boxed in.
- Watch for objects that could potentially blow into the roadway.
- Dust and debris is likely to be more prevalent and can easily reduce visibility. Use dipped headlights.

Summary

In poor weather, consider cancelling or postponing any non-essential journeys by vehicle.

If your journey has to take place, driving defensively is especially critical during adverse weather. Plan ahead and be prepared. Adjust your speed and braking distance in all adverse weather conditions. Do not take chances when weather and road conditions deteriorate.

Drive with caution and watch for other motorists who may lack the skill or experience to drive competently.

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