

10 Emergencies and Special Situations

This section suggests ways to handle emergencies and special situations. Remember, driving requires complete attention. Unexpected events can happen very quickly, leaving little time to react. Plan ahead.

Emergencies

- Never stop on a freeway except for an emergency. If you must stop, turn on the emergency hazard flashers, slow down gradually, and pull all the way off the pavement as soon as safely possible.
- When stopped, always be alert for approaching and passing vehicles and stay well off the roadway. Raise the hood, tie a handkerchief on the radio antenna, driver-side door handle or mirror, then lock the doors and wait for assistance. If you must leave your vehicle, close the hood and lock the vehicle.
- When traveling alone or with children at night, it may be a good idea to stay in the vehicle with windows closed and doors locked. It is dangerous and illegal to walk on a freeway.
- If your vehicle's hood opens while driving, slow down while looking through the windshield between the hood and dashboard or out the window for a place to stop safely.
- Carry a flashlight, flares, or warning triangles to warn other drivers of a disabled vehicle at night. Put flares at least 100 feet behind the vehicle at the side of the road. Additional flares placed beside and 100 feet ahead of the vehicle add more protection.

Braking

Under normal stopping situations, all brake systems are applied the same way—a steady firm push on the brake pedal.

Under extreme conditions, such as on snow, ice, or in an emergency stop on dry pavement, antilock brake systems work differently than other brake systems. In a vehicle with antilock brakes, apply the brake with hard firm pressure from the start and maintain this pressure until you have stopped. You may feel or hear vibrations and/or pulsations—this is normal.

In a vehicle without antilock brakes, apply the brakes just hard enough to not lock the wheels. If the wheels do lock, release pressure and apply the brakes again. This method of braking is sometimes referred to as “threshold” or “controlled” braking.

Skids

When driving on snow or a slippery road, slow down gradually. Test the vehicle’s brakes lightly to get a feel for the road. Most skids happen when a driver tries to turn at too high a rate of speed or stop suddenly on slippery pavement.

To prevent a skid in vehicles with standard brakes, use steady pressure on the brakes without locking them. This method allows the wheels to turn, maintaining steering control. If the vehicle has full antilock brakes, maintain brake pressure and steer.

If the vehicle begins to skid, remain calm and do the following:

To Steer Out of a Skid

- Take your foot off the accelerator.
- Turn the front wheels only enough to keep them pointed in the direction you want to go and no farther.
- Be prepared for a secondary skid in the opposite direction.
- Again, turn the wheels in the direction you want to go. Then straighten the wheels to bring the vehicle under control.

Driving in Bad Weather

Preventive maintenance prior to the winter season is the best way to ensure safe travel. Regularly check fluid levels such as power steering, brake, windshield washer, and oil.

Make sure the antifreeze is strong enough to prevent freezing and fresh enough to prevent rust. In cold weather, you may also

want to change the windshield washer fluid to one containing antifreeze.

Leave extra time and drive more slowly when it is foggy, raining, or snowing and conditions are hazardous. Allow greater following distance in bad weather. In cold weather, bridges and underpasses freeze before the road does.

Rain

- When it begins to rain, the roads are most slippery during the first half-hour. This is because oil dropped from passing vehicles has not been washed away. Be especially cautious at intersections where oil deposits may be heavier. Slow down and allow at least twice the normal following distance.



- Brakes may become wet after driving through deep water or during heavy rain. Test them, as they may pull to one side or the other, or they may not hold at all. Slow down and gently push on the brake pedal until the brakes work properly again.
- It is possible to lose control of the vehicle on a wet road because the tires ride on top of the water. This is called hydroplaning. This can happen if the vehicle's tires are worn or tire pressure is low.
- When it is foggy, drive slowly. Turn on the low beam headlights. Be ready for a fast stop. If the fog becomes so thick that you cannot see at all, pull off the pavement and stop. Turn on the four-way emergency flashers and wait until the fog lifts.

Using the Headlights

The distance you can see ahead is reduced at night, so driving is more dangerous.

- Headlights must be turned on one half-hour after sunset until one half-hour before sunrise, and at other times when visibility is reduced. Use low-beam headlights when it is foggy, raining, or snowing during the day. If

you are having trouble seeing other vehicles, they will have trouble seeing you. Turn on your headlights whenever you are in doubt.

- Headlights must be turned on any time there is not enough daylight to see people and vehicles clearly at 500 feet. When the law requires vehicles to have their headlights on, it is illegal to use only the parking lights.
- You should be able to stop within the clear distance you can see ahead. When driving at night, it is most important to drive within the range of the headlights.
- It is illegal to use or even flash high-beam headlights within 500 feet of an oncoming vehicle. Also, dim lights for pedestrians and cyclists.
- If oncoming drivers do not dim their headlights, keep your eyes on the right edge of the road ahead. Do not look straight at oncoming headlights. The glare may blind you for several seconds. A dirty windshield will make headlight glare worse.
- Do not use high beams when driving behind other vehicles. The reflection of bright lights in a driver's rearview mirror can be distracting.

If an Oncoming Vehicle is in Your Lane

- If there is time, tap the horn to warn the other driver.
- Brake hard, but do not lock the wheels in a vehicle that is not equipped with antilock brakes.
- Look for an escape route on the right edge of the road.
- Try not to go to the left since the other driver may see you and return to his or her proper lane.
- Try an emergency stop in your lane only if there is enough room and you cannot pull off the road.
- If you cannot stop before hitting another vehicle, try to steer around the vehicle. Do not turn more than needed to avoid a crash.

When Involved in a Crash

- Stop and remain at the scene.
- Help secure medical aid for the injured.
- If possible, get off the roadway and/or move vehicles out of the path of traffic.
- Notify the police if there are injuries or property damage exceeding \$1,000.00.
- Exchange names, addresses, driver's license numbers, and registration and insurance information with the other driver(s) involved.
- Leaving the scene of an accident could result in fines and/or imprisonment.

The Car/Deer Collision

At night, be alert for shining eyes at the roadside. Slow down. Be ready to stop—deer are very unpredictable. Try not to swerve if a deer enters the roadway. If one deer is visible, others may be nearby. If you hit a deer, report it to the local or state police, sheriff's department, or the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. They also can provide a permit to keep it.

Other Safety Tips

- Never turn the ignition to the “lock” position while your vehicle is in motion. This will cause the steering to lock. Once the steering locks, if you try to turn the steering wheel, you will lose control of the vehicle.
- Never leave keys in the car or ignition.
- Make sure there is enough gas.
- Be aware of your surroundings. Is there a police or fire station nearby, open service station, or other open business to get help should you need it?
- Do not hitchhike or pick up hitchhikers.