

8

Basic Skills, Laws, and Safety

This section provides information about basic skills, laws and safety, with tips for preparing to drive, controlling speed, signaling, yielding, turning at intersections and at red lights, using lanes, passing, freeway driving, parking, and using cruise control. Safe driving requires that you understand and use these basic skills.

Some Basic Driving Tips

The following tips can help you drive safely.

- Concentrate on your driving. A momentary distraction can lead to a crash. Do not allow tasks, such as tuning the radio, searching for a compact disk, eating, or talking on the cell phone, pull your attention from the road.
- Drive defensively.
- Obey all traffic control devices and traffic laws.
- Be courteous to others.
- Communicate your intentions to others.
- Be aware and keep alert. Even though you follow the laws, realize others may not.
- Recognize that you share the road with others whether they are walking, bicycling, or driving.
- Avoid looking at any one thing for more than a few seconds.
- Watch for vehicles coming from alleys or parking places when driving in a business district.
- Always give yourself enough time and space to do what you need to do safely. Never follow another vehicle too closely.

- Be more careful and increase your following distance at night, during bad weather conditions, rush hour, during maneuvers such as lane changes, and when approaching intersections.
- Do not drive when you are tired.
- Always obey a law enforcement officer's orders or directions. An officer's directions take priority over a traffic light or stop sign.

Preparing to Drive

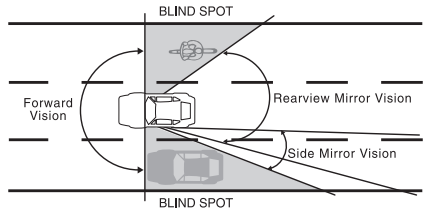
Before operating a vehicle:

- Check for clean headlights, taillights, and brake lights. Make sure all lights and turn signals work properly.
- Clean the windshield and windows.
- Check the tires for proper air pressure and for any possible damage.
- Check in front and behind the vehicle for objects, animals, or people in your path.

Before starting the engine:

- Make sure you are positioned comfortably in the driver's seat.
- Make sure you and all passengers, including children, are properly buckled up.
- Check mirrors and check again for anything in your path. As a driver, you have at least two blind spots or areas around your vehicle that you cannot see in your rearview or side-view mirrors—to the left rear and right rear of the vehicle. Make sure the inside rearview mirror is properly adjusted so you can see the center of the road and any traffic behind the vehicle. Adjust the left outside mirror to see the left edge of the vehicle when seated in a normal driving position. If there is a right outside mirror, adjust it to permit a clear view of the right rear edge of the vehicle.

- Turn your head to check the blind spots before every lane change. You cannot get rid of blind spots, but can make them smaller by properly adjusting the mirrors.



- Know the type of braking system installed in your vehicle. If it has antilock brakes, be sure to read and follow the instructions in the owner’s manual.

Controlling Your Speed

Michigan’s Basic Speed Law means you must drive at a “careful and prudent” speed in all driving conditions. You must drive at a speed that always allows you to stop within the clear distance ahead. This speed is never faster than the posted speed limit. Depending on conditions, it may be slower than the posted speed limit. Anticipate trouble ahead. Be ready to stop safely.

Speed Limits

Watch for and obey regulatory speed signs that tell you the safe or suggested speed. Unless posted otherwise, the fastest speed you may drive is:

- 15 mph—In mobile home parks and on some roads adjacent to parks and playgrounds.
- 25 mph—In business and residential areas and in parks and in most school zones.
- 45 mph—When entering and passing through a designated work area where a normal lane or part of the lane is closed for construction, maintenance, or surveying activities.
- 55 mph—On Michigan’s highways.
- 70 mph—On freeways— 55 mph is the minimum speed. The maximum speed for buses and trucks is 60 mph on freeways with a 70 mph limit. On all other freeways, buses and truck are restricted to 55 mph.

Give Yourself Time and Space to Stop

Your stopping distance can be affected by fatigue, how well you pay attention, the type and weight of your vehicle, the condition of your tires and brakes, the type of road surface, and the weather. Try to estimate how much time and space you have for stopping on either dry or wet pavement.

A three- to four-second following distance is required. When the rear of the vehicle ahead passes a sign or any other stationary point, calculate the time it takes you to reach the same spot by counting “one thousand one, one thousand two, one thousand three.” You are following too closely if you pass the mark before you finish counting for three seconds. When speeds are increased, or during adverse driving conditions, increase your following distance up to six seconds.

Wet pavement requires more stopping time and space. To make a smooth stop, increase pressure on the brake pedal gradually and just before you stop, reduce the pressure.

Look Down the Road 12 Seconds

This rule means always look ahead of the vehicle about 12 seconds worth of travel time down the road. To estimate this distance, choose a fixed object near the road ahead and begin counting, “one-thousand one, one thousand two...” until the front of your vehicle passes the object. If you have not counted to “one-thousand twelve,” you should be looking farther ahead.

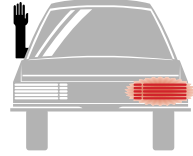
A defensive driver anticipates problems ahead and is prepared to react in time. Keep a safe distance behind another vehicle. Under poor or slippery driving conditions, allow even more time.

Signaling

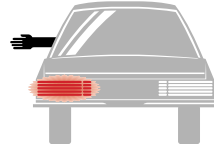
Signaling is a legal requirement and a courtesy. Before stopping, turning, or changing lanes, see if it is safe. Communicate to other drivers by giving the required signal, either using your left hand and arm, or your vehicle’s turn signal. Signal at least 100 feet ahead of where you plan to turn. In heavy traffic or on freeways, signal sooner so drivers behind you have time to adjust their speed.

The proper hand-and-arm signals are:

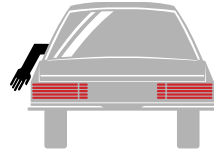
Left arm and hand bent up for a right turn.



Left arm and hand straight out for a left turn.



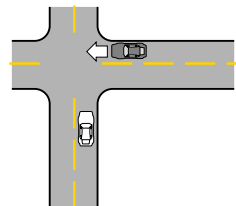
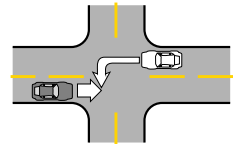
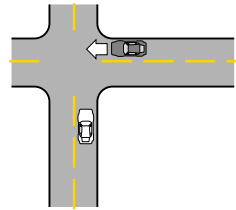
Left arm and hand bent down for slow or stop.



Yielding

Most crashes occur at intersections. Always remember—any time you are not sure what other drivers are going to do, let them go first.

- When approaching intersections without traffic signals or signs, or four-way stop intersections, yield to the driver on the right if you reach the intersection at the same time as another vehicle. Yield to any vehicle that reaches an intersection before you.
- When making left turns, you must give the right-of-way to pedestrians and oncoming traffic.
- When approaching an intersection with a yield sign, slow down before reaching the intersection, and then yield the right-of-way to any vehicle in the intersection and to cross traffic. Stop if necessary.



Yielding in Other Circumstances

Before entering an intersection, always check cross traffic. Prepare to stop and yield the right-of-way to a vehicle or bicycle coming from the left or right, or to pedestrians in the intersection.

- You must also yield when directed by a uniformed law enforcement officer and when directed by flag people at construction sites.
- You must yield for vehicles in a funeral procession.
- You must stop and yield the right-of-way when entering a highway from an alley, private road, or driveway and before turning on a red light.
- When entering a roundabout, you must yield the right-of-way to drivers already in the roundabout and obey all traffic signs.
- When entering an intersection at sunrise or sunset, use extra care as other drivers may have difficulty seeing you.
- You must yield to emergency vehicles, approaching from any direction or if stopped, when their lights are flashing. Time is critical in an emergency situation. Pulling over and allowing emergency vehicles to reach their destination as quickly and safely as possible may save a life. Never stop in a roundabout for emergency vehicles. Exit the roundabout before pulling over to the side of the road.
- When at intersections, watch for oncoming motorcycles, bicycles, and other small vehicles. Because of their size, it is difficult to judge their distance and speed. After a crash, it is not uncommon for motorcyclists or bicyclists to report that the other drivers looked right at them but still failed to *see* them. As an automobile driver, be on the alert for motorcycles, bicycles, and other small vehicles, and give them plenty of time and extra room.

Turning at Intersections

Crashes at intersections result in more traffic fatalities and serious injuries than on any other segment of the road. As you approach an intersection, look for traffic signals and lane markings.

- Look and plan ahead. Be alert for pedestrians and vehicles that may disregard a red light and proceed through an intersection without stopping. Allow time and space to make your turn safely.
- When turning left at an intersection, check cross traffic and yield to oncoming traffic and pedestrians.
- When turning right at an intersection, check the road you are turning onto for pedestrians and other vehicles.
- After turning left onto a one-way street, stay in the left lane until you can change lanes safely.
- Keep alert as smaller vehicles approach the intersection, such as motorcycles, bicycles, and mopeds. Because of their size, it may be difficult to judge their distance and speed. Protect these riders by being courteous and allowing them to clear the intersection before beginning your turn.
- If you come to an intersection where you cannot see clearly because of trees or buildings, stop at the intersection and edge forward slowly.
- If you have entered an intersection when the signal light changes, complete your turn as soon as traffic clears. Do not try to back up in an effort to avoid blocking the intersection.

Right Turns on Red Lights

Unless a sign tells you “no turn on red,” you may turn right at a red light after coming to a complete stop. You must yield to pedestrians and approaching traffic. Make sure to look to your left, front, and right for any oncoming traffic, motorcycles, bicycles, or pedestrians before starting your turn. Then turn carefully.

Some Left Turns on Red Lights

Unless a sign tells you “no turn on red,” you may turn left on a red light when entering a one-way street from another one-way street, but you must first stop and yield to cross traffic.

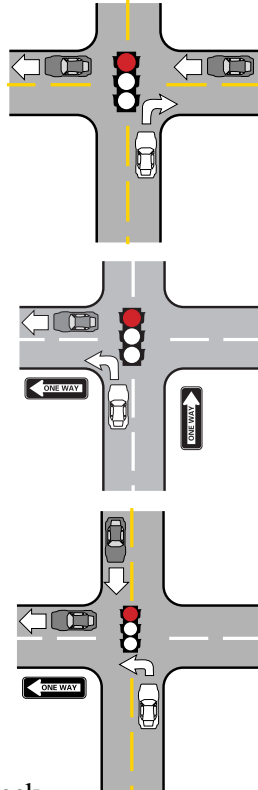
You may also make a left turn from a two-way street onto a one-way street with traffic going in the same direction as the turn. Yield first to pedestrians and approaching traffic.

Passing

When passing other vehicles, always check your rearview and side-view mirrors for any overtaking traffic. Use your turn signal to indicate your intentions. Check blind spots by turning your head to see if you can safely move from your lane without interfering with traffic. It is illegal to exceed the speed limit or use the shoulder of the road to pass. When about to pass a vehicle on a divided highway, move into the passing lane well before passing. When passing a pedestrian or a slow-moving vehicle, such as a bicycle, farm equipment, or a horse and buggy, allow adequate room so that the person or vehicle is not endangered.

Passing on the Left

On a two- or three-lane road with traffic moving in both directions, you may pass on the left when overtaking another vehicle if there are no signs or other markings prohibiting passing,



and it can be done safely. Passing another vehicle on the left is prohibited when:

- You must cross a solid yellow line.
- There is a “no passing” sign.
- Approaching a hill or curve where your view is obstructed.
- Your view is obstructed within 100 feet of a bridge, viaduct, or tunnel.
- Oncoming traffic is close enough so you would interfere with the safe operation of the approaching vehicle or the vehicle being passed.
- You cannot see clearly ahead.
- When the center lane of a three-lane road is marked for left turns only.

When passing or preparing to pass another vehicle by using the center lane of a three-lane road, always use extreme caution. Approaching vehicles may also be preparing to pass. If you and an approaching vehicle move into the center lane at the same time, a serious crash could occur. If the center lane is marked for left turns only, using this lane for passing or merging is prohibited.

After passing another vehicle, return to the right lane when there is enough room to return safely. One rule of thumb is to return to your lane when it is possible to see both headlights of the vehicle you passed in the rearview mirror.

Remember to allow extra room when pulling a trailer. Do not try to pass more than one vehicle at a time or follow too closely when another vehicle is passing slower traffic.

A driver being passed on the left must give way to the passing vehicle. Do not increase speed until the other vehicle has completely passed.

Passing on the Right

When two or more lanes of traffic are moving in the same direction, passing other vehicles in either lane is allowed. However, slower moving vehicles should always stay in the lane farthest to the right except when preparing to make a left turn.

When driving in the right lane, passing another vehicle should be done cautiously, as the driver of the other vehicle may not see you and may turn into your path. Passing on the right of another vehicle by crossing the solid white line that marks the edge of the roadway is prohibited, even if the shoulder is paved or a bike lane is present. It is also illegal to use a right-turn lane for passing.

Passing Parked Vehicles

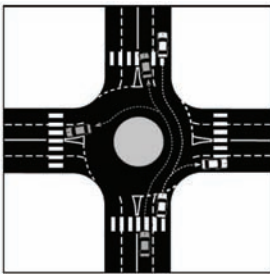
When driving past parked vehicles, watch for vehicles that may pull out in front of you. Look for clues, such as a person in the driver's seat, exhaust coming from a tailpipe, illuminated brake lights, a flashing turn signal, illuminated backup lights, or at parallel parking areas, a vehicle's front wheels turning out. Watch for a vehicle door being opened in front of you. Also, watch for pedestrians or bicyclists trying to cross the road between parked vehicles.

Passing Vehicles in Slow-Moving Traffic Lanes

In some areas with a long or steep grade, a slow-moving traffic lane may be provided to allow vehicles that are unable to maintain the speed limit to travel without blocking traffic.

These slower-moving vehicles should move into the designated traffic lane, allowing other vehicles to pass them in the second lane.

Roundabouts



A roundabout is a circular intersection at which all traffic travels counter-clockwise, always to the right, around a central island. Vehicles entering from each leg of the intersection must yield to the traffic already in the roundabout, which is coming from the left. Vehicles exit the roundabout by making a right turn onto the desired road.

Approaching the roundabout:

- Slow down before entering a roundabout.
- Look for roadside signs and pavement markings to direct you into the correct lane **before** entering the roundabout.



- As you approach the yield line, look to your left before proceeding into the roundabout.
- When an appropriate gap in traffic appears, enter the roundabout and merge with the flow of the other vehicles. Never make a left turn to enter a roundabout – this will place you in front of oncoming traffic.

Traveling in a roundabout:

- Always stay to the right of the center island.
- Vehicles within the roundabout have the right of way.
- Do not stop within a roundabout unless it is the only way to safely avoid a collision or other danger.
- Avoid changing lanes in a multiple-lane roundabout. Move into the lane you need before entering the roundabout.
- Give special consideration to trucks, trailers and other large vehicles. Avoid passing or driving next to large vehicles, as they may need more than one lane to navigate through the roundabout.
- When entering or exiting a roundabout, watch for pedestrians crossing the street.

Exiting the Roundabout:

- Maintain a slow speed.
- Indicate your exit by using your right turn signal.
- Do not accelerate until you are beyond the pedestrian crossing at the exit.

Freeway Driving

Freeways are our safest roads. Traffic flows in the same direction. There are no stops or intersections. Pedestrians, small motorcycles of 124 cc or less, mopeds, bicycles, all-terrain vehicles, and slow-moving vehicles are not allowed on freeways.

An entrance ramp allows traffic to enter the freeway. Often, an exit ramp will be next to the entrance ramp. Look for “Do Not Enter” and “Wrong Way” signs and speed limit signs. The entrance ramp usually merges into an acceleration lane allowing you to increase your speed to match freeway traffic speed.

Signal and check for freeway traffic by using the vehicle’s rearview and side-view mirrors and quick glances over your shoulder. Choose a safe space to enter and then merge into traffic. Traffic on the freeway has the right-of-way. Do not count on other drivers to let you in.

- On a two-lane freeway, drive in the right lane except when passing, exiting to the left, allowing another vehicle to merge onto the freeway, when the lanes are fully occupied with heavily congested traffic, or when emergency vehicles or construction workers are on the shoulder.
- On a freeway with three or more lanes of travel in the same direction, you may drive in any lane, however, if driving at or near the minimum speed limit, drivers should stay in the lane with the slower moving traffic. A commercial vehicle with a gross vehicle weight of more than 10,000 pounds, a truck tractor, or a combination vehicle with a trailer must stay in either of the two lanes farthest to the right, unless otherwise designated.
- Merge signs are placed near freeway entrances to alert you to traffic entering the freeway. Always watch for vehicles merging onto the freeway. Adjusting your speed or moving safely into another lane will allow drivers to enter the freeway smoothly and safely.
- Always watch for drivers who suddenly slow down when approaching an exit or swerve into the exit lane unexpectedly.

Leaving a Freeway

Most freeway exits have a special deceleration lane to slow down in when exiting the freeway. Look ahead for exit ramp signs you want and the lane you must use. Check in front, behind, and to the side for traffic. Signal your intention early and then move into the proper lane.

Avoid slowing down on the freeway when exiting. Wait until you are fully in the deceleration lane before reducing your speed, and then slow down gradually. Many ramps have sharp curves, so it is important to obey the posted exit ramp speed limit.

If you miss your exit ramp, never back up, turn around, or use a median crossover. Instead, drive to the next exit. Get back on the freeway and return to the exit you want. Never use the crossover lane in the median. It is only for emergency and Michigan Department of Transportation vehicles.

Fatigue

One of the greatest dangers in freeway driving is fatigue. On long trips you can become sleepy or hypnotized by the constant hum of the wind, tires, and engine. If necessary, let someone else drive. Do not rely on coffee or “stay awake” drugs.

If you feel tired, stop and rest for a 10-minute break at least every two hours. Pull off the highway at the next exit. Find a motel or rest area and relax.

If you must drive, keep shifting your eyes from one area of the road to another. Keep checking the mirrors. Look at objects near and far, left and right.

Cruise Control

Cruise control is best suited for use in rural areas where there is not much traffic. Set the cruise control at or below the posted speed limit. This steady pace saves gasoline and allows for acceleration to pass slower moving vehicles without blocking the left lane for extended periods. Acceleration does not cancel the cruise control setting—depressing the brake pedal will.

Using cruise control in heavy traffic, near large numbers of exit and entrance ramps, or when roads are slippery from rain, snow, or ice is not recommended. This could require the constant resetting of the cruise control to the point you are distracted, increasing your risk of being involved in a crash. Most vehicle

manufacturers do not recommend using cruise control when towing heavy loads.

Parking Your Vehicle

Crashes sometimes occur because people did not park their vehicles properly. Whenever you park and leave your vehicle, always turn off the engine and set the parking brake. Take the keys and lock your vehicle. Do not rely on the transmission to hold your vehicle in place. Exiting your vehicle into the street can be dangerous. Watch for bicycles, motorcycles, mopeds, or other vehicles that might be passing. Check the mirrors before opening the door for traffic that may not see you. When returning to your vehicle, face oncoming traffic as you approach the driver's side.

Parking on a Hill

To park on a hill, turn the tires so that if the unattended vehicle starts to roll, it moves into the curb. Always use the parking brake. You cannot expect the transmission to hold your vehicle on a hill.

Parking Violations

Communities may pass parking ordinances for local streets that are stricter than state law. Signs will be posted at the city limits. The owner of a vehicle parked illegally is responsible for any parking tickets. If the vehicle is being leased, the person leasing it is responsible. The following is a partial list of “no parking laws.”



Never Park:

- Where “no stopping,” “no standing,” “no parking,” and “no parking at any time” signs are posted.
- Within 500 feet of a fire or a crash.
- In a space reserved for the disabled, unless you are properly using a disability license plate or placard.
- Within 15 feet of a fire hydrant.
- Within 20 feet of a fire station driveway on the same side of the street or, when marked, within 75 feet of the driveway on the other side of the street.

- Within 50 feet of the nearest rail of a railroad crossing.
- In front of any driveway, alley, theater, emergency exit, or fire escape.
- Next to a road where you block the view of drivers turning at an intersection.
- More than 12 inches from the curb.
- Within 30 feet of a stop sign, traffic light, or flashing beacon, including a warning sign.
- In a lane of a highway outside city or village limits if there is a highway shoulder.
- On a bridge or overpass, under a bridge, or in a tunnel.
- On a sidewalk or in front of a public or private driveway.
- Within an intersection, crosswalk, or designated bike lane.
- Within 20 feet of a marked crosswalk, or 15 feet of an intersection if there is no crosswalk.
- On the street-side of a legally parked vehicle (double parking).
- In a manner that obstructs delivery of mail to a rural mailbox.

Never Leave a Child Unattended in a Parked Vehicle

Children should never be left unattended in motor vehicles – even for a minute. Unsupervised children may present a kidnapping risk and can be injured or die from the extreme temperatures generated in the vehicle. For example, on days when it’s 72 to 96 degrees outside, temperatures inside a vehicle can soar from 112 to 136 degrees within an hour – and a body temperature of 107 degrees is lethal to an infant or young child. In cold weather, hypothermia and exposure to carbon monoxide poisoning in an idling vehicle’s cabin can be equally as deadly.

On average, about 36 children die each year nationwide after being left unattended in a vehicle. Never leave your child alone in a vehicle – and don’t forget about your pets. They can suffer the same fate as children when left alone in a vehicle.

How to Reduce Auto Theft/Carjacking

Auto theft costs motorists millions of dollars each year. Be aware of your surroundings, especially who is around your vehicle, whether you are driving or leaving your vehicle in a parking lot. When parking your vehicle, park in a well-lighted lot, close all windows, keep expensive goods out of sight and locked up, remove the keys, and lock the vehicle. Consider buying a vehicle alarm. To report auto theft, telephone the police. Then telephone HEAT (Help Eliminate Auto Thefts) at (800) 242-HEAT.

In a carjacking, one or more people take a car from the owner by force. Sometimes, they stage a minor rear-end incident called a “bump and run” at a traffic light or stop sign. When you get out to inspect the damage, one person robs you while the other steals your vehicle. If you are confronted with this situation, stay in your car. Wait for police or drive to an area where help is available. If you are threatened, prepare to drive on.

Other Safety Tips

- Keep your vehicle in good working condition.
- Have your vehicle identification number (VIN) chemically etched on the car window and main parts to help prevent your car from being stolen for parts.
- Alarms and interlocks to prevent other kinds of car theft can also discourage amateur carjackers.
- Tell people your route and estimated time of arrival at your beginning and ending stops.
- When driving, keep doors and windows locked. Stay alert for danger. If available, take freeways rather than streets through high-crime areas.
- Close a sunroof at night and in high-risk areas.
- Do not get out to fix a flat tire. Try to drive slowly to a service station or store with a well-lighted parking lot and telephone for service.
- Choose the safest route to any destination.
- Park as close to that destination as possible.

- Always have keys ready when returning to the car. Be aware of your surroundings and people who appear to be in the wrong place, seem suspect or whose demeanor makes you uncomfortable. While you are still outside the car, check the interior for possible intruders.
- If someone acting suspiciously approaches your vehicle, try to drive away or sound the horn.
- In case of danger, stay inside the locked car.
- If you are in trouble, use a cell phone if available.
- If a carjacker wants the vehicle, give it up without a fight. A car can be replaced, but personal safety is priceless. Stay calm. Get a good description of the carjackers.

Tall Loads and Low Bridges - Bridge Hits and Damages

A bridge hit is when a vehicle, its load, or equipment collide with a bridge or an overpass. Every year, these structures are damaged by vehicles or their loads that were too tall to pass safely underneath.

- Bridge hits are dangerous because the driver may be killed or seriously injured.
- An accident may cause the death of another driver or member of the public.
- You may be liable for the costs of bridge damage, examination, and repair.
- You may be prosecuted for traffic offenses.

Save lives by knowing or doing the following:

- Know the height and width of your vehicle and its load.
- Do not assume that the heights posted at bridges and overpasses are correct. Repaving or packed snow may have reduced the clearance since the heights were posted. Know your route and check the height of bridges before beginning your trip. Resources such as the Michigan Truck Operators' Map can help you plan your route.