

KNOW HOW TO HANDLE WINTER DRIVING EMERGENCIES

Despite all your precautions, you find yourself stopped or stalled on the road. Whether your car has broken down, run out of gas or is stuck in the snow, don't panic.



GENERAL EMERGENCY SAFETY RULES

From the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration:

- * **Stay with your car.** Unless you are within sight of a safe place to go, staying with your car is your safest bet. It's not only a source of shelter and warmth, it makes it easier for rescuers to find you. And keep your seat belt on in case another car runs into you while you are stopped.
- * **Don't overexert yourself.** Don't wear yourself out trying to dig your car out of the snow. You'll get wet and make it harder to keep yourself warm.
- * **Call 911 or a roadside service like AAA.** Let them know you are stranded and ask them how long it will take to get to you. If phone service is not available, try texting 911 (see "Cell Phones, 911 Dispatch & Traveling"). Plug your phone into a power bank or cell phone charger, and turn off data to conserve the battery.
- * **Make yourself visible.** Put bright markers on the antenna and/or windows and set out reflective emergency triangles if you have them. Turn on your hazard lights, and if it's dark, keep the interior dome light turned on (it uses less electricity than your headlights).
- * **Don't run your car for long periods.** If you must run your car's engine to keep warm, be certain the exhaust pipe is clear of snow, ice or dirt, and check it periodically. Run the vehicle for only 5-10 minutes each hour and be sure to open the windows slightly for ventilation. Keeping the car running continuously could lead to asphyxiation from carbon monoxide poisoning.
- * **Stay hydrated.** Snow can be melted to drink if needed.



STAYING WARM

- * **Roll up the windows.** When you are not running the engine, keep windows shut tightly to conserve warmth.
- * **Bundle up.** If you have emergency blankets, wrap yourself up. If you have passengers in the car, huddle together to share warmth. No blankets? Use anything you can find to provide extra insulation, including floor mats, newspapers, seat covers, etc.
- * **Make sure your clothes are dry.** Wet, cold clothing will draw the heat from your body and carry it away into the air.
- * **Put on a hat and mittens.** Skin loses heat wherever it is exposed.
- * **Loosen your shoelaces.** This will allow blood to circulate to your toes and help you avoid frostbite.
- * **Light a candle for warmth.** Put the candle inside a coffee can. (See “Can Do!”)
- * **Shake arms and legs** to keep blood flowing to extremities.
- * **Be alert for signs of hypothermia.** (See “Warning Signs of Hypothermia.”)
- * **Try to stay awake, if possible.** If there are others with you in the car, take turns sleeping. Hypothermia can kill.



WHAT TO DO IF YOU'RE STUCK

If your vehicle is stuck in the snow, follow these steps to get it free:

- * Watch for traffic and make sure it is safe to make the attempt.
- * Shovel 2-3 feet clear in a straight line in front of the drive tires. (In a rear-wheel-drive vehicle, these are the two in the back.)
- * Point the wheels straight.
- * Temporarily turn off your traction control, if applicable.
- * Using a soft foot on the accelerator, carefully rock the vehicle by first shifting into Drive, then Reverse, then back to Drive, and so on. Make sure the vehicle is not in motion during the shifting, or you may damage the transmission.
- * If there are helpers available, ask them to push the vehicle forward while you perform the above rocking maneuver.

- ❄ Still stuck? Sprinkle sand, kitty litter or rock salt under the tires for traction.
- ❄ Before calling a tow truck, a last resort is to try letting a little air out of the tires. This increases the contact area between the tires and the road/snow, giving you more traction.



WINTER FIRST AID: HYPOTHERMIA & CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING

WARNING SIGNS OF HYPOTHERMIA

CONFUSION



SHIVERING



DIFFICULTY SPEAKING



SLEEPINESS



APATHY



Hypothermia occurs when skin is exposed to cold temperatures and loses heat faster than the body can replace it. See the above graphic for early symptoms of hypothermia.

In more advanced stages (core body temperature less than 90 degrees), shivering stops, and organs like the heart and liver protect the brain by shutting down all but the most vital functions. Victims of hypothermia may experience:

- Slowed pulse
- Hallucinations
- Slow and shallow breathing
- Weakness throughout body
- Sleepiness
- Confusion and coordination issues which may mimic intoxication
- Suddenly feeling overheated (may attempt to remove blankets or clothing)



FIRST AID STEPS FOR HYPOTHERMIA

❄ Mild hypothermia:

- Remove all wet clothing.
- Rewarm with warm or heated blankets.
- Provide warm beverages to drink.
- Place heating packs on the center of the body — neck, chest and groin.
- Avoid rewarming quickly.
- Avoid standing or walking for 30 minutes.

❄ Moderate to severe hypothermia:

- Call 911, as advanced paramedic intervention is critical.
- Monitor breathing and heartbeat.
- Give rescue breathing or CPR as needed.
- Gently move to warm location if possible but avoid having victim stand or walk.
- Remove all wet clothing.
- Place heating packs on the center of the body — neck, chest and groin. Avoid warming extremities (hands and feet), as this can cause shock. If heating packs are not available, body heat (skin-to-skin contact) from others can be lifesaving.
- Cover with blankets.



CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING

❄ Carbon monoxide poisoning can result if you run your vehicle's engine when the exhaust pipe is blocked, or while the vehicle is in an enclosed space.

❄ Carbon monoxide (CO) is a colorless, odorless and deadly gas, and you will not know you are overexposed to it until you exhibit any of the following symptoms:

- Severe headache that won't go away
- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness
- Upset stomach and vomiting
- Weakness

FIRST AID STEPS FOR CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING

❄ Get outside to fresh air immediately. Removing exposure to the gas is critical.

❄ If breathing or pulse has ceased, start CPR.

❄ Transport to a hospital immediately for oxygen therapy.





EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

The best way to live through a winter driving emergency is to be prepared.

- ❄️ **Let someone know your route.** Tell a friend or family member where you are going, what route you'll be taking, and when you expect to arrive.
- ❄️ **Create a Winter Emergency Bucket.** A 5-gallon pail (find one at your hardware store) filled with these emergency items could save your life:
 - Long-burning candles (find in camping supply section of store)
 - Lighter and waterproof matches
 - Cell phone cord and power bank
 - Space blanket (Mylar)
 - Medication
 - Flashlight, batteries and glow stick
 - Hand warmer packets
 - Toilet paper
 - High-calorie food: nuts, granola bars, dried fruit, hard candy, etc.
 - Extra mittens, hat and socks
 - Coffee can (see below)
- ❄️ Other helpful items to keep in your car:
 - Auto Emergency Kit (jumper cables, reflective triangles or road flares, jack and lug wrench to change a tire, small fire extinguisher in case of a car fire). Keep this in your car all year long.
 - Winter boots
 - Blankets and/or sleeping bags
 - Shovel
 - Bag of sand or kitty litter for traction under tires
 - First aid kit (bandages, tape, gauze, antiseptic wipes, antiseptic cream)
 - Multi-tool or small toolkit
 - Radio (battery or hand-cranked power)

❄️ **Can Do!**

An ordinary coffee can can serve many purposes in a winter emergency.

- Use as a scoop to clear snow away from car and exhaust pipe.
- Use to melt snow for water if stranded.
- Light a candle inside can to provide heat.





CELL PHONES, 911 DISPATCH & TRAVELING

Having a mobile phone to call for help is critical, especially in frigid winter temperatures. Mobile phone reception depends on radio frequency waves from cell towers, and not all carriers have access to towers across the state. Calls may drop or not connect depending on your geographic region.

Make sure you're emergency-ready by following these cell phone tips:

- * **Plan ahead.** Before you travel, click this link to see where your carrier offers coverage: <https://www.deadcellzones.com/coverage-maps.html>. If coverage by your carrier is minimal on your route, purchase a SIM card or prepaid phone to use while traveling.
- * **Always have a charger.** Keep a charger, power cord, and/or a charged power bank in your car to ensure you always have battery power for your phone.
- * **Add ICE info to your phone.** Knowing who to call In Case of Emergency (ICE) can help responders give you prompt treatment. If your cell phone has a place to enter an emergency contact name and number, do it now. If not, just create a new contact and label it, "ICE". Include the names and numbers of anyone you would want contacted if you were ill or injured. You can also add notes about allergies or other important medical information.

For locked phones: If you have your screen locked for privacy, responders won't be able to access this info. Consider adding it directly to your lock screen.

- * **Be aware of your location.** GPS-capable phones allow the E-911 program to determine your location in an emergency. However, where cell towers are nonexistent, 911 operators will not be able to find you. Referencing a mile marker, street name or landmark will get help to you faster. Every second counts.
- * **Text to 911.** More than half of Michigan counties now offer the ability to text a dispatch center for help. If dialing doesn't work, try sending a text to 911, which *may* connect.

