

# 3 Basic Skills, Laws and Safety

This chapter 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.

## DRIVING SAFELY

**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 talking on a mobile phone, texting, using a GPS, tuning the radio, searching for a compact disk or eating distract your attention from the road.
- Drive defensively.
- Obey all traffic control devices and traffic laws.
- Be courteous to others.
- Communicate your intentions by using your turn signals or hand-and-arm signals.
- 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.

- Drive cautiously and increase your following distance at night, during bad weather, 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. An officer's directions take priority over other traffic control devices.

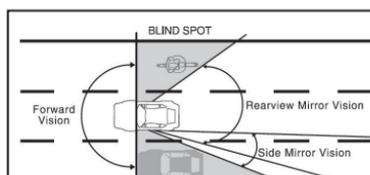
### **Before operating a vehicle:**

- Check for clean headlights, taillights and brake lights. Make sure all lights and turn signals work properly. You can be ticketed for defective or missing equipment.
- Clean the windshield and windows.
- Make sure your tires are properly inflated and check them for any damage or wear.
- Check in front and behind the vehicle for objects, animals or people in your path.

### **Before starting the engine:**

- Make sure you are seated comfortably in the driver's seat.
- Make sure you and all passengers (including children) are properly buckled up.
- Check mirrors and look again for anything in your path. Most cars have at least two blind spots or areas around them that you cannot see in your mirror – to the left rear and right rear of the vehicle. Adjust the inside rearview mirror so you can see the center of the road and any traffic behind the vehicle. To minimize blind

spots, many drivers adjust the left and right outside mirrors to see the edges of the vehicle when seated in a normal driving position. An



alternate adjustment method can further reduce blind spots. While seated in the driver seat, lean left to touch your head to the driver side window; adjust the left outside mirror to barely show the rear edge of the vehicle. Then lean right to position your head above the center console or in line with

the rearview mirror; adjust the right outside mirror to barely show the rear edge of the vehicle.

- Turn your head to check the blind spots before every lane change. You cannot completely eliminate blind spots, but they can be made smaller by properly adjusting the mirrors.
- Know the type of braking system installed in your vehicle. Be sure to follow the instructions in the owner's manual.

## **SPEED LIMITS**

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. The following summarizes some of the standard speed limits defined under the Michigan Vehicle Code.

- 15 mph – In mobile home parks and some municipal parks.
- 25 mph – In platted subdivisions (showing boundaries, streets, easements and other features of surveyed lots) and condominium complexes. Watch for signs when driving through business districts, county, state and federal parks, on roads adjacent to parks and playgrounds, and in school zones as posted speed limits vary.
- 45 mph – In a work zone if posted. If a work zone is not posted for 45 mph, then the speed limit is the normal speed limit for that area.
- 55 mph – Unless otherwise posted, on all streets that are not designated freeways and on all highways.
- 70 mph maximum/55 mph minimum – On all freeways unless posted otherwise. School buses and trucks are restricted to 60 mph. On freeways with speed limits less than 70 mph, school buses and trucks are restricted to 55 mph.

## STOPPING DISTANCES

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 or more if necessary.

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**

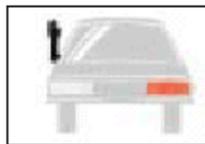
This rule means always look ahead of the vehicle about 12 seconds worth of travel time down the road. To estimate this distance, choose a fixed object near the road ahead and begin counting, “one-thousand one, one thousand two...” until the front of your vehicle passes the object. If you have not counted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

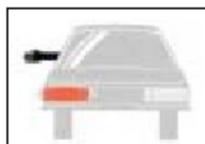
## SIGNALING

Signaling is a legal requirement and a courtesy. Before stopping, turning or changing lanes, look to 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.

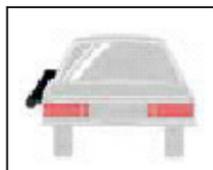
Left arm and hand bent up for a right turn.



Left arm and hand straight out for a left turn.



Left arm and hand bent down for slow or stop.

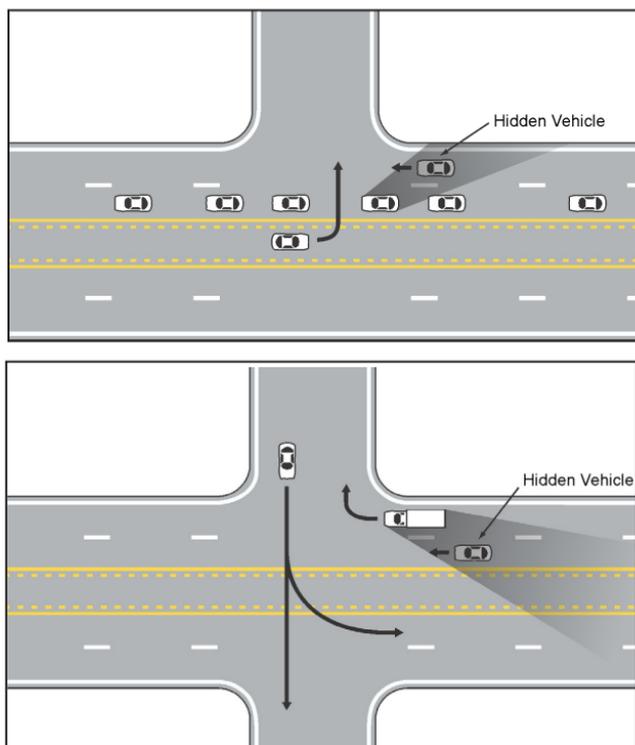


## INTERSECTIONS

Crashes at intersections result in more traffic fatalities and serious injuries than on any other portion of the road. Being alert and cautious at intersections will help keep you safe. As you approach an intersection, check for oncoming and cross traffic, other highway users, signals, signs and pavement markings, the condition of the roadway and areas of limited visibility.

- Be alert for vehicles and pedestrians that may disregard a traffic signal or other traffic control device and proceed through an intersection without stopping or yielding the right-of-way. Anytime you are not sure what other drivers are going to do, be safe and let them go first.
- Keep alert and look twice for smaller vehicles approaching an intersection, such as motorcycles, bicycles and mopeds. Because of their size, it may be difficult to judge their speed and distance. Protect these riders by being courteous and allowing them to clear the intersection safely.
- Be especially cautious if you cannot see the road or traffic clearly at an intersection because of trees, buildings, piles of snow or other obstructions. Edge forward slowly until you can see past whatever is blocking your view. Once the intersection is clear or traffic signals indicate you may proceed, continue driving with care.

- When entering an intersection at sunrise or sunset, use extra care as other drivers may have difficulty seeing you.
- 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.
- Be alert for “hidden vehicles” when crossing multiple lanes. Traffic may be hidden by larger vehicles that are traveling in the same direction.



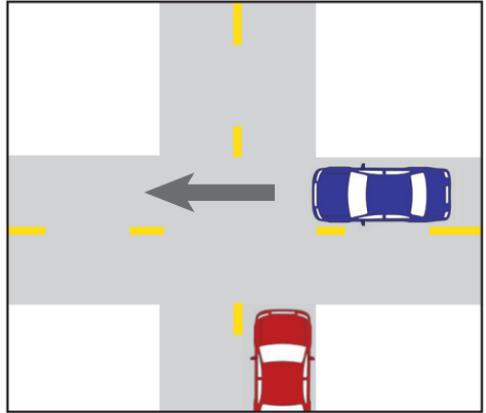
## YIELDING

### **Yield the right-of-way at all intersections:**

- When turning, check the road you are turning onto and yield to pedestrians and other vehicles present.
- Yield the right-of-way to vehicles, bicycles and pedestrians in the intersection.

**At intersections without any signals or signs, or at intersections with all stop signs:**

- 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.
- At a “T” intersection without any signals or signs, yield the right-of-way to vehicles and pedestrians on the through road.
- You must stop and yield the right-of-way when entering a highway from an alley, private road or driveway.

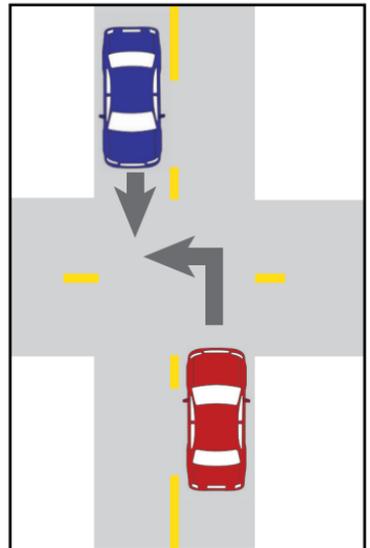


**At traffic signals:**

- When turning left at a traffic signal, you must yield the right-of-way to pedestrians and oncoming traffic.

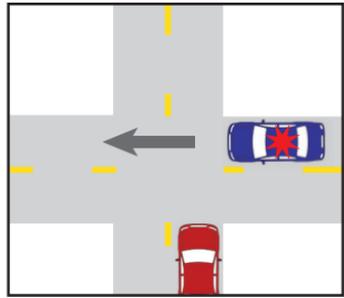
**At stop or yield signs:**

- Yield the right-of-way to any vehicle or pedestrian in the intersection and cross traffic that is not required to stop.
- When turning left at a stop or yield sign, yield the right-of-way to cross traffic and pedestrians. Yield to the first vehicle from the opposite side that is going straight or turning right. Then, you may turn left so long as cross traffic and pedestrians are still clear.



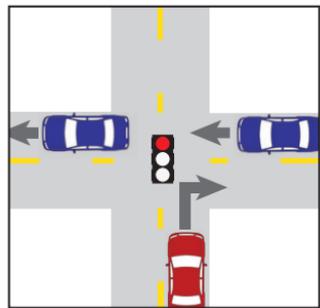
### Other reasons to yield:

- You must 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 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 destinations as quickly and safely as possible may save a life.
- You also must yield whenever you are approaching or passing a stopped waste collection, utility service or road maintenance vehicle with its lights flashing.



## TURNING ON A RED LIGHT

**Right turn on red:** 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 before starting your turn. Then turn carefully.



**Left turn on red:** 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. (Figure 3-1.)

You also may make a left turn from a two-way street onto a one-way street with traffic going in the same direction as the turn, but first yield to pedestrians, cross traffic and approaching traffic. (Figure 3-2.)

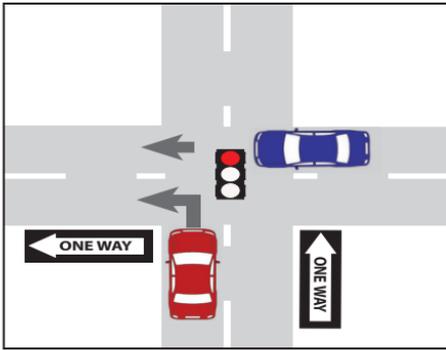


Figure 3-1

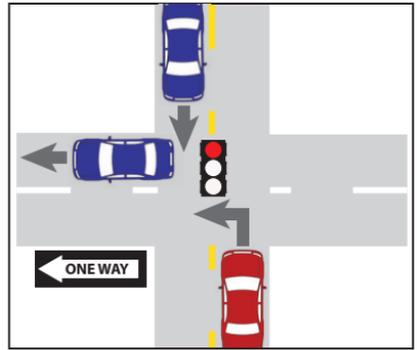


Figure 3-2

## LANE POSITION WHEN TURNING

When turning at an intersection, use the pavement markings, signs or signals for direction on how to proceed.

**If there is nothing posted, keep the following points in mind:**

- When turning right onto a multiple lane road, you are required to turn into the lane closest to the right-hand curb or road side.
- When turning left onto a multiple lane road, you are required to turn into the lane that is just to the right of the center line of the roadway.
- When turning left onto a multiple lane one-way road, turn into the lane closest to the left-hand curb or road side.
- When multiple turn lanes are present, complete your turn by entering the lane that corresponds to the lane you are

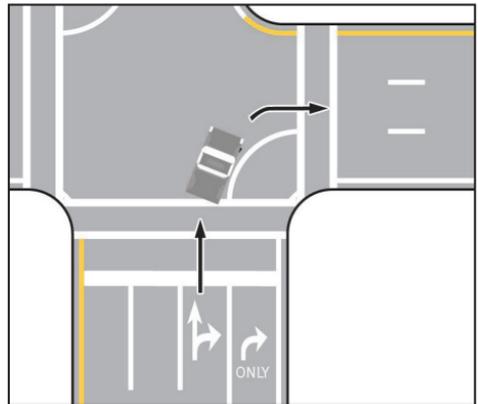


Figure 3-3: Right turn with multiple turn lanes

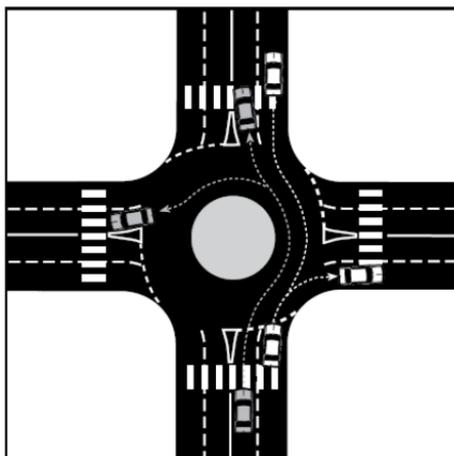
leaving. Be alert for drivers next to you who may cross into other lanes as they turn. (See Figure 3-3.)

## ROUNDAOBOUTS

A modern roundabout is a circular intersection where entering traffic yields to vehicles traveling counterclockwise 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 as you approach the 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.

- If an emergency vehicle is heard or seen approaching, do not stop. Continue to your exit, pull over to the right and stop, allowing the emergency vehicle to pass.
- 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.
- Refrain from passing other vehicles, bicycles and mopeds.
- 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 turn signal.
- Do not accelerate until you are beyond the pedestrian crossing at the exit.

## 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.

## 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, yielding the right-of-way to vehicles on the freeway. 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, 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.
- 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 or against the flow of traffic. This means the curb should never be more than 12 inches from your vehicle when parked.
- 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 or under a bridge (excluding bridges with parking meters or parking spaces), on an overpass 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).
- So that you obstruct delivery of mail to a rural mailbox.
- In a disability parking space if you don't have a disability parking placard or disability license plate.
- In a disability parking space if none of the occupants in the vehicle are disabled.
- On the blue-striped access aisle or access lane adjacent to a van-accessible disability parking space.
- In a manner that interferes with a ramp or curb cut used by people with disabilities.

## OTHER SAFETY TIPS

- Keep your vehicle in good working condition.
- Have your vehicle identification number etched on the car window and main parts to help prevent it 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 arrival time 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.
- When returning to your car: Have your keys ready, be aware of your surroundings and of people who appear to be in the wrong place, seem suspect or whose demeanor makes you uncomfortable. Before entering the car, check the interior for possible intruders.

- In case of danger, stay inside the locked car.
- If someone acting suspiciously approaches your vehicle, try to drive away or sound the horn.
- If you are in trouble, use a mobile 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.



## Auto theft costs millions of dollars each year

To report auto theft, call the police and then call HEAT at 800-242-HEAT (4328)

### Remember to:

- Park on streets or in lots that are well lit.
- Be aware of your surroundings.
- Never leave the keys in the car.
- Lock your car when you leave it.
- Keep expensive items out of sight.



**Help Eliminate Auto Thefts (H.E.A.T.)** is a community education and prevention program that connects citizen information with public law enforcement action to combat auto theft-related crimes in Michigan.