

Chapter 7: Emergencies and Special Situations



Did you know that . . . ?

- In 1930, Fisher Body introduced the slanted windshield to reduce glare from the lights of oncoming traffic at night.
- In 1955, Ford Motor Co. announced that seat belts would be offered as a factory-installed option.
- In 1974, the first mass-produced air bags were offered as an option in some Cadillacs and Buicks.

Safe driving

Safe driving involves more than learning the basics of operating a vehicle and memorizing the rules of the road. Safe driving also requires good judgment and reflexes, experience, patience and common sense. It is your best defense as a driver.

If you are a young teen driver, you may feel uncertain about your skill behind the wheel. Your understanding and judgment may not be as well developed as an experienced driver's. As you practice driving, first on the driver education range, then with your parents, guardians or another designated licensed adult 21 or older, and later, once you are licensed to drive without supervision, your skill and confidence will grow.

If you are a middle-aged driver, you may have become complacent about your driving ability after years of driving. However, driving on "autopilot" may actually leave you vulnerable on the road because you are not really attuned to your driving environment and its potential risks.



If you are an older driver, you have years of experience but may face difficulties brought about by health and aging challenges. Research indicates older drivers can improve their driving ability through additional training, enabling them to maintain their driver's license while driving safely. AAA RoadWise Driver and AARP Driver Safety programs both offer in-person and online driver refresher courses. To find the testing and refresher courses nearest you, visit Michigan.gov/AgingDriver.

Aggressive driving

Aggressive drivers run stop signs and red lights, speed, tailgate, weave their vehicles in and out of traffic, pass on the right when it is not legal to do so and may make improper hand gestures. They sometimes yell at you, honk their horns or flash their headlights.

If you respond equally, the situation can get out of control and escalate into road rage, in which a weapon or the vehicle itself is used to assault the other driver.

The exact number of traffic crashes caused by aggressive drivers is unknown, but the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has estimated 66 percent of all traffic fatalities are caused by aggressive driving behaviors.

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Are you an aggressive driver?

Do you:

- **Merge improperly?** Failing to merge smoothly disrupts the flow of traffic. Always try to merge smoothly when entering the expressway or turning from one road to another. If you see other drivers making an ill-advised merge or turn, slow down and give them room. Getting angry will not help and your anger could adversely affect your judgment, resulting in a crash. A driver may be wrong, but how important is it to prove you are right? Do not risk injury or death because you feel you have been wronged when driving. It is much wiser to back off and allow the driver to merge.
- **Drive slowly in the left lane?** Use all lanes properly and obey the speed limit. If you are using the left-hand lane to pass slower traffic and someone tailgates you, move back into the right-hand lane when it is safe to do so and allow the faster traffic to move ahead. Driving in the left-hand lane and allowing traffic to build up behind you increases the chances aggressive drivers may take careless risks attempting to get around you.
- **Tailgate?** This is another aggressive-driver trait. If other drivers tailgate you, pull over and let them pass. It is better to have these unsafe drivers in front where you can see them rather than having them driving on your rear bumper.
- **Make inappropriate gestures?** Never gesture at other drivers when you become angry. If another driver is gesturing to you when you have made a driving error, let him or her know you are sorry. Everyone makes mistakes. Returning gestures or becoming angry will not correct your mistake. It will only serve to make both of you angrier and increase the risk of confrontation or a traffic crash.

Always remember that safe driving is affected by your driving attitude and your ability to control your stress and anger. Do not let an aggressive driver's behaviors provoke you to the point where you feel compelled to react in kind.

If confronted by an aggressive driver, attempt to get out of the way, avoid eye contact and ignore gestures or verbal attacks. If safe to do so, call the police and report the aggressive driver.

If an aggressive driver is involved in a crash farther down the road, stop a safe distance from the crash scene, wait for the police to arrive and report the driving behavior witnessed.

Take care at 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.

Intersections

- As you approach an intersection, check for oncoming and cross traffic, other highway users, pedestrians, 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.

Freeway driving

Freeway traffic flows in the same direction and does not have 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



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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 heavily congested with traffic or when emergency vehicles or construction workers are on the shoulders.
- 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, stay in the lane with the slower moving traffic.
- 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.
- 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.

A word about merging

Few topics of discussion get motorists' blood boiling quicker than the proper way to merge. What is proper and legal? How should you merge? Merging onto a freeway entails fast-moving traffic, and, if the roadway is also congested, say at rush hour, merging can be all the more difficult.

Here's what state law says about merging: "When a vehicle approaches the intersection of a highway from an intersecting highway or street which is intended to be, and is constructed as, a merging highway or street, and is plainly marked at the intersection with appropriate merge signs, the vehicle shall yield right of way to a vehicle so close as to constitute an immediate hazard on the highway about to be entered and shall adjust its speed so as to enable it to merge safely with the through traffic." MCL.257.649(7).

Got it?

Translation: If you are the vehicle merging onto (in this case) the freeway, you are the one who must adjust speed and placement so as to merge safely and avoid a crash with traffic already on the freeway. This applies whether you are entering a freeway or exiting the freeway and merging into a lane of traffic.

Leaving a freeway

- Most freeway exits have a special deceleration lane to slow down in when exiting the freeway. Watch for exit ramp signs that indicate which lane to use when exiting the freeway. Make sure to check for traffic and use your turn signal to let other drivers know that you are moving over into the exit-ramp lane.
- Avoid slowing down on a 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.

Freeway 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

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and engine. If necessary, let someone else drive.

- Do not rely on coffee or "stay awake" drugs. If you feel tired, stop and take 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. Check your 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.

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 if your vehicle does not have anti-lock 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 it. Do not turn more than needed to avoid a crash.

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 of the engine and fresh enough to prevent rust. In cold weather, you may also want to change the windshield washer fluid to one containing an antifreeze agent.

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 and fog



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.

When your tires ride on top of the water on a wet road, you are hydroplaning, which can result in a loss of control. Worn tires, low tire pressure or driving too fast contribute to hydroplaning.



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If a flooded road is blocked off by safety barricades, do not drive around them. The barricades are there because it is unsafe for vehicles. There may be debris or power lines in the water or the road may have been washed away. If there are no barricades in place at a flooded road, consider finding an alternate route. If you do try to drive through, do so with extreme caution. In addition to the hazards already mentioned, deep water can damage your vehicle's engine.

Drive slowly in fog. Turn on the low-beam headlights and be prepared to stop quickly.

If fog becomes so thick that you cannot see at all, pull off the road. Turn on the four-way emergency flashers and wait for the fog to lift.



Ice, snow and other slippery conditions

Remember when driving on ice and snow, drive slowly. Driving in snow and ice requires extra attention. In cold weather, be alert and listen for snowmobiles, watch for trail or crosswalk signs along the roadway and be prepared to stop. You will not have the same stopping power in slippery conditions as you will when road conditions are dry and clear.

- When driving on snow or a slippery road, slow down gradually.
- Test your vehicle's brakes lightly to get a feel for the road. Most skids happen when a driver tries to turn too quickly or stops 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 anti-lock brakes, maintain brake pressure and steer.

If your vehicle begins skidding

- 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.

Braking

How and when you use your brakes will depend on the road and traffic conditions and the type of brakes on your vehicle.

- Under normal conditions, you apply a steady, firm push on the brake pedal to slow and stop your vehicle.
- In extreme conditions, such as on snow, ice or in an emergency stop on dry pavement, how you brake depends on your braking system.
- With anti-lock 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 or pulsations, this is normal.
- In a vehicle without anti-lock 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.

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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.

- To estimate how much time and space you have for stopping on either dry or wet pavement, follow this general rule. A 3- to 4-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 3 seconds. When speeds are increased, or during adverse driving conditions, increase your following distance up to 6 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 20-30 seconds. This rule means always look ahead of the vehicle to spot potential hazards and avoid last-second reactions. This defensive driving technique and higher-level visual and anticipatory driving skill will assist you in staying safer on the road.
- Anticipate problems ahead and be prepared to react in time. Keep a safe distance behind another vehicle. Under poor or slippery driving conditions, allow even more time to stop.

Driving at night

Nighttime driving is hazardous because your visibility is reduced.

- 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 your low beams 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 on any time there is not enough daylight to see people and vehicles clearly at 500 feet. It is illegal to use only parking lights when headlights are required.
- You should be able to stop within the clear distance you can see ahead. When driving at night, it is critical to drive within the range of your headlights.
- It is illegal to use or even flash high-beam headlights within 500 feet of an oncoming vehicle. Also, dim your 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 directly into oncoming headlights. The glare may blind you for several seconds. A dirty windshield will make headlight glare worse.
- Do not use high beams when behind other vehicles. Bright lights shining in their rearview mirrors can be distracting.



Emergency situations

Knowing how to handle the unexpected and being prepared for emergencies when you are driving is the best defense for safeguarding lives and property.

During the five-year period from 2014 to 2018, about 10 percent of all pedestrian-related traffic crash fatalities involved a roadside emergency. Generally, the safest thing to do if you are involved in a roadside emergency is to stay in your car, with your seat belt



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buckled, until help arrives. For more information, visit Michigan.gov/StayinYourCar.

Crashes

Whether you are stopping at the scene of a crash to provide help or are involved in one yourself, it is important to understand your responsibilities.

If you are involved in a crash, do not drive away. Leaving the scene of a crash is against the law and punishable by fines, jail time or both. Penalties for fleeing increase if alcohol was involved or if the crash resulted in injuries or fatalities.



Help secure medical aid for the injured.

Vehicles involved in crashes that do not result in serious injury or death shall be moved from the main roadway by the driver or a passenger with a valid driver's license if the vehicle can be driven and it is safe to do so. Select a safe location, such as the shoulder, median, or a parking lot near the crash site.

Exchange names, addresses, driver's license numbers, registration and insurance information with the other drivers involved in the crash.

Notify the police if there are injuries or property damage exceeding \$1,000.00.

Vehicle – deer crashes

About 60,000 vehicle-deer crashes happen in Michigan each year and officials suspect that as many as half are unreported. Vehicle-deer crashes are costly. The average crash results in \$2,100 in damages, usually to the vehicle's front end. Annual costs for these crashes statewide are estimated at \$130 million. If you hit a deer, report it to local law enforcement, the county sheriff's office, Michigan State Police or Michigan Department of Natural Resources. They can provide a permit to keep it.

Your best defense against deer

- Stay aware, awake, alert and sober.
- Always wear your seat belt. Seat belts are your best defense in any collision.
- Be especially alert in fall and spring, but remember that vehicle-deer crashes can occur at any time of the year.
- Watch for deer crossing signs.
- Slow down if you see one deer. Deer frequently travel in groups. Chances are there are others nearby.
- Be especially alert for deer at dawn and dusk.
- Do not rely on gimmicks. Deer whistles, flashing your high-beam headlights or honking your horn will not deter deer.

If a vehicle-deer crash is unavoidable

- Do not veer for deer; stay in your lane.



- Brake firmly.
- Hold onto the steering wheel with both hands.
- Come to a controlled stop.
- Steer your vehicle well off the roadway.

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Driving requires you to plan ahead to stay safe

- Keep your vehicle in good working condition.
- Make sure you have enough gas to get to your destination.
- Tell people your route and estimated arrival time at your beginning and ending stops.
- 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.
- 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.

Before starting the engine

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

Do not take risks

- Never turn the ignition to the "lock" position while your vehicle is in motion or the steering will lock. Once the steering locks, if you try to turn the steering wheel, you will lose control of the vehicle.
- When driving, keep doors and windows locked. Stay alert for danger. If available, take freeways rather than streets through high-crime areas.
- Be aware of your surroundings. Is there a police or fire station, service station or other business open nearby if you should need help?
- Do not hitchhike or pick up hitchhikers.
- Never leave keys in the car or ignition.
- 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.

If you are approached or threatened while in your car

- If someone acting suspiciously approaches your vehicle, try to drive away or sound the horn.



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- Stay inside the locked car.
- 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 carjacker.

If your car becomes disabled

Pull as far off the traveled portion of the roadway as possible. Activate your four-way emergency lights and stay inside your vehicle with your seat belt securely fastened. It is recommended that a professional with the proper training and equipment assist with your disabled vehicle to keep you and your occupants in the vehicle safe.

If you must leave your vehicle, be extremely aware of passing traffic and walk directly to a safe location, far away from the traveled portion of the roadway. Remember that it is dangerous and illegal for a pedestrian to walk on the freeway.

If you are pulled over

If a law enforcement officer signals you to pull over, pull off on the right side of the road as soon as it is safe to do so and stop. The officer may want you to move your vehicle to a different location for safety's sake. Stay calm, maintain your composure, follow the officer's orders and do not make any movements or take any actions that could escalate the situation.

Stay in your car with your seat belt on. Turn on the interior lights if it is dusk or dark outside. Open your window. Keep both hands empty and in plain sight on the steering wheel. Ask your passengers to keep silent and keep their hands clearly visible and empty.

Do not appear angry, confrontational or accusatory. Speak with the same respect you expect in return. Take your license, registration and insurance card out only when the officer asks for them. Let the officer know where these items are located before you retrieve them.

The officer should inform you of the reason for the stop. In some cases, the officer may ask you to exit

your vehicle. Do not argue about the reason for the stop or if you are issued a ticket. If you believe the officer's conduct was inappropriate, cooperate with any directions you are given and follow up with a call to the officer's supervisor. If you feel the stop or the ticket is inappropriate, discuss the matter with the court, not the officer.

After the stop, make sure you and your passengers are safely buckled up. Check for traffic and pedestrians before driving away. Use your turn signal and follow all laws when pulling onto the road. The officer may remain with lights activated until you have safely left.

In conclusion

Putting into practice the information found in this manual is a good step toward becoming a better informed driver. Concentrate on your driving. A momentary distraction can lead to a crash. Keep your attention on the road and remember these tips to help keep safe:

- Drive defensively and stay alert to what others around you are doing.
- Obey all traffic control devices and traffic laws.
- Always obey a law enforcement officer's orders. An officer's directions take priority over other traffic control devices.
- Be courteous to others.
- Use your turn signals.
- Avoid looking at any one thing for more than a few seconds.
- 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.

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Notes