

Winter Driving Tip for Teens

Geauga County, due to its elevation and proximity to Lake Erie, is traditionally one of the places most affected by winter weather. Deep roadside ditches and steep hills in many locations add to the danger of sliding off the road during winter weather. Many cars are totaled and people injured each year from simple slide offs into deep ditches. Following these tips can go a long way in minimizing the grief you may experience.

Clear frost, remove snow and scrape ice to help increase your road visibility before driving during the winter months. Before driving, make sure your windows are clear. Winter driving is tough, winter blind driving brought on by laziness is ridiculously dangerous!

Extend your focus further down the road. If you see a light turn red 1200 feet ahead of your vehicle, take your foot off the accelerator and let natural tire friction and wind resistance begin to slow your vehicle to prevent brake slamming where slipping can occur. If you can actually “time” the light, you won’t have to use your brakes at all.

Avoid known problem areas. Taking an alternate route to avoid steep hills and secondary roads which have not been plowed can go a long way in preventing winter driving mishaps.

Reduce speed. Don't be pressured by cars behind you to drive faster than you feel comfortable with. Always leave early for your destinations to avoid being late due to winter roadways.

Increase following distance. Add another second or more to the normal three-second following distance. Keeping a safe distance between you and the car in front of you ensures you can stop fast enough, even on icy roads.

Brake more carefully. Give yourself more braking room, and remember not to pump anti-lock brakes. Providing constant pressure to your brakes gives you better braking and steering control.

Beware of ice patches. Know where ice forms most readily such as bridges, overpasses, shady spots and intersections.

Watch carefully for “black ice.” If the road looks slick, it probably is. “Black ice” can be one of winter’s worst hazards. It is nearly transparent ice that often looks like a harmless puddle or is overlooked entirely. Test the traction with a smooth brake application or slight turn of the wheel.

In snow, drive in the ruts. The traction is better when you drive in ruts, or tire tracks. Also, make sure you change lanes slowly and smoothly. If only one of two lanes is plowed, drive in that lane only.

Technology offers no miracles. All-wheel drive (AWD) and electronic stability control (ESC) can get you into trouble by offering a false sense of security. Four wheel drive does little to help you stop more effectively in slippery conditions at normal driving speeds. Don’t let these lull you into overestimating the available traction.

Stay home! Postpone or avoid all but the most essential travel.

Parents can help prepare young drivers for winter driving conditions with these basic safety tips!

Driving on roads covered with ice or snow is a challenge for any driver. Even with years of experience, hitting a patch of ice and going into a skid is a nightmare. If these wintery conditions can cause problems for seasoned drivers, imagine how dangerous it is for new drivers who don't have years of road training to rely on in an emergency.

- ❖ Make sure you (the parent) help your teen practice driving in all types of weather, so they're prepared for rain, sleet, snow and ice. Inexperienced drivers are more likely to panic when road conditions are less than ideal.
- ❖ Enforce seatbelt use. Remember that in the vast majority of fatal traffic accidents deaths could have been prevented if the driver and passengers were belted in. Since inclement weather increases the number of potential accidents, this is incredibly important. Set a good example, and be the first to buckle up whether you're the driver or passenger in your car.
- ❖ Teach your teen how to handle a skidding car. It's crucial that even new drivers know how to regain control in the event of an emergency. Under close supervision, let your teen practice slow speed maneuvers on a wide open snow- or ice-covered parking lot. Have him or her practice hard braking and steering in skidding situations.
- ❖ A novice driver's first on-road experience with winter-weather driving should not occur during a major blizzard. Wait until conditions are less severe.
- ❖ When the roads aren't clear, drive slowly, and be sure your teen follows this example as well. Driving with caution is one of the best ways to stay safe in winter weather.
- ❖ Consider limiting your teen's driving on slippery conditions to daylight hours until they have gained experience.
- ❖ Remind your teen that driving under the influence of drugs and alcohol is dangerous under any conditions, and that the risk is even greater on slippery roads.
- ❖ Make sure the vehicle your teenager will be driving is in proper working order. Winter weather is tough on car's mechanical systems and stopping in slippery conditions requires brakes and tires that are in top condition. Check the tire tread and make sure the air pressure meets recommended PSI. Also check to ensure windshield wipers work properly and that the washer fluid is full.
- ❖ Make sure your teen driver is prepared for the worst: keep a road-side safety kit, flashlight, jumper cables, extra blankets, sand or non-clumping cat litter and a small shovel or ice scraper in the vehicle. Add a few snacks, energy bars and bottled water to the trunk of your car in case of a breakdown, or in case they become stranded due to weather.