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# SAFER WINTER DRIVING



New Zealand is renowned for its changeable weather which means you should plan and prepare before you find yourself on an icy, wet or snowbound road.

Most of the time New Zealand has a temperate climate. However, storms can hit the country with little warning, delivering heavy rain, ice and snow, especially during the winter months (usually between June and August).

This is the most hazardous time of year for driving, with frost and ice occurring throughout the country and snow in areas like the central North Island and alpine passes in the South Island.

The following winter driving tips will help you stay safe on the road.

## **PLANNING YOUR JOURNEY**

- › Always check the weather forecast and road conditions before you leave.
- › Consider if you really need to travel, especially if the weather is poor.
- › Think about where you're going and what route you should take - choose safety over convenience.
- › If travel can't be put off, allow extra time for your journey.
- › Plan to drive during daylight hours when visibility is better and hazards such as ice and snow are less likely. Avoid driving at night when hazards rapidly multiply.
- › If travelling long distances, make sure you are well rested and plan where to have a break.
- › Share the driving if possible or allow for stops every two hours.

- › Dress for the conditions, carry additional warm clothes and keep a survival kit in your vehicle in case you do get stuck.
- › Ensure your car is roadworthy and keep at least half a tank of fuel in your vehicle in case you get diverted onto another route or you are forced to turn back.
- › Be prepared for snow and carry tyre chains that you know how to fit and use.



## **WHEN YOU'RE ON THE ROAD**

- › Drive slower than you normally would - it only takes a split second to lose control in wet or icy conditions.
- › Avoid sudden braking or turning that could cause you to skid. Accelerate smoothly and brake gently, and use your highest gear when travelling uphill and your lowest downhill.
- › For vehicles without anti-skid braking systems, pump the brake pedal in short rapid bursts rather than pressing long and hard to avoid skidding or sliding.
- › Drive at a safe travelling distance because it takes longer to stop on slippery roads. In winter, especially in poor weather, double the two-second rule to ensure a safe distance between you and the car in front.

- › When travelling in fog, rain or snow, drive with your lights dipped for increased safety.
- › As well as other drivers, there could be winter maintenance vehicles on the highway helping to keep the road open. If you come across any of these vehicles, stay a safe distance behind them and don't pass unless you're instructed to.

## Am I safer in a four-wheel drive (4WD)?

Four- and all-wheel drive vehicles have greater traction when accelerating on snow and ice, which combined with more ground clearance allows them to travel further on snow-covered and icy roads. However, this is no guarantee of increased safety when cornering or braking, and you will still need to reduce speed and drive to the conditions.

## Tips for spotting ice and snow

- › Look out for shaded areas caused by high banks and tall trees where roads freeze sooner and ice may not thaw during the day.
- › Bridges could also stay slippery longer than other road surfaces, so slow down when crossing.
- › Frost is more severe at daybreak so be prepared for this after it becomes light. While it may not be frosty at 6am, it could be an hour or two later.

## Is information available when I'm on the road?

- › On roads that are subject to closure in winter, electronic message signs provide drivers with up-to-date warnings on current conditions. The messages on these signs are changed remotely and will be blank when there are no restrictions.
- › Many radio stations will also provide road condition bulletins, so listen to your local station for updates.
- › You can also call **0800 4 HIGHWAYS** or visit **[www.nzta.govt.nz/traffic](http://www.nzta.govt.nz/traffic)** for the latest road conditions.

## Do you put anything on icy roads to help?

Grit and an anti-icing agent called CMA is spread or sprayed on some roads to help travel in icy conditions.

Grit and CMA, which are sometimes used at the same time, lessen the severity of winter road conditions but do not completely stop the effect of ice and snow, so remember to drive to the conditions and slow down.

The speed at which ice and snow can occur means that there will be times when grit and CMA have not yet been spread.

If we have spread grit, drive on it where possible and not in a wheel track, to maximise its effect.

## IF THINGS GO WRONG

- › In the event of an emergency, dial 111.
- › For mechanical breakdowns, contact your breakdown service provider.
- › If you do get stuck, stay with the vehicle and keep everyone warm until help arrives.
- › If you are involved in a crash, tell the police even if no one is injured – this type of information helps us to make improvements to the road where necessary.



## ALWAYS REMEMBER

- › Drive to the conditions.
- › Allow greater following distances on frosty and wet days.
- › Obey emergency road closed signs and barriers.
- › Follow the directions of any road patrol or police officer.
- › Avoid towing in icy conditions.
- › Road closures and restrictions are put in place for everyone's safety. It is against the law to drive on a closed highway. If you choose to ignore closures or restrictions, you do so at your own risk, and it voids your insurance.

## PLAN YOUR JOURNEY

For latest winter driving conditions in your area:



Website

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Call

**0800 4 HIGHWAYS (0800 44 44 49)**