

SUMMER DRIVING TIPS FOR TEENS (AND ADULTS, TOO)

Summer months, specifically the period between Memorial and Labor Days, are historically the most dangerous for teen drivers, with the highest percentage of motor vehicle collisions. The roads are busy with vacationers, college students home from school and teens as they travel between summer jobs and social activities. We're put together 10 tips to help you beat the heat on the road and ensure a safe and fun summer.

Prepare yourself

Watch your speed.

While driving through neighborhoods and backing up, watch out for kids playing and oncoming cars. According to SmartMotorist.com, most accidents are caused by excessive speed or aggressive driver behavior. An advantage of taking it slow? A lower speed means better gas mileage, and more money in your pocket. Rapid acceleration and braking also waste gas.

Don't rush.

Allow extra time for you to get to work or meet up with friends. There are more people on the road and speeding is still the number one cause of accidents, and was found by the NHTSA to be a factor in 31 percent of all fatal crashes. Defensive drivers get into fewer accidents and crash prevention programs like In Control in Massachusetts can offer you significant insurance discounts.

Respect trucks.

Trucks on the road, especially bigger ones, have significant blind spots to avoid. The general rule is that if you can't see a truck's side mirrors, the truck driver can't see you. According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, large trucks and commercial vehicles caused over 5,000 fatal crashes and over 100,000 serious injuries in 2010.

As the weather changes, your driving should, too.

Always use headlights in the rain, and allow even more following distance between you and the next car (more than the general 3-second rule). See SmartMotorist.com's full list of rainy driving tips here.

Focus on the road.

Save your calls and texts for after you are safely at your destination - nothing is that important, and if it is, pull over. Eating, putting on makeup and searching for music all add to the horrific statistics for casualties and injuries. Take a few moments to review these facts from the U.S. Government. For example, sending or reading a text takes your eyes off the road for 4.6 seconds. At 55 mph, that's like driving the length of an entire football field blindfolded. Distracted driving kills.



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Rising temperatures can be tough on a car's mechanics so keep your car's owner manual close by. Keep the list for colder months, as many apply.

Prepare your car

Test your car's battery. Hot weather can strain batteries, so if the vehicle's battery is more than three years old, test it at a certified car repair shop.

Get an oil change. Look for local Living Social or Groupon deals in your area, which often feature discounts on car services like oil changes.

Tire inspection. Remove snow tires if you have them on (many in NH and Mass. do), and check tire pressure (refer to your owner manual). Ensure that your tires are in good condition as this is critical to the safety of your vehicle; according to the NHTSA, approximately 400 fatalities may be due to tire failures annually. Not sure about your tires? Check out seven steps to determine when your tires need replacing.

Monitor fluid levels. Too little engine coolant/antifreeze can lead to overheating. Replenish brake, power steering and windshield washer fluid while you're at it. Antifreeze will be your best friend if your car overheats; you can buy it at most gas stations, as well as larger chain stores like Target or Pep Boys.

Keep a basic roadside emergency kit in your car. This should include roadside flares (1-2), jumper cables, a flashlight with fresh batteries, paper towels, extra washer fluid, antifreeze and a small first aid kit. Check out Edmunds.com for a more comprehensive list.

Finally, some tips for parents of teen drivers. Take advantage of cheaper GPS prices, and buy one for your teen's car so they won't need to use their smartphones for directions. Or, if they're going to use their smartphones, ensure they've downloaded an app like the free Mapquest app that gives directions verbally and does not require the driver to look at their phone/map. If your children want to head to a summer concert or beach, offer to drive with them before to practice the route. Planning the trip in advance, having directions or knowing your route will ensure the main focus is on driving. While it might not make perfect, practice builds experience and skills that teen drivers desperately need.

