

# Preparedness Alert

Colorado Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management  
9195 East Mineral Avenue • Suite 200 • Centennial, CO 80112 • 720.852.6600  
**November 2017**



**COLORADO**  
Division of Homeland Security  
& Emergency Management  
Department of Public Safety

## Be prepared for winter driving

Winter driving is a part of life in Colorado. Like it or not, for several months out of the year, motorists must deal with cold, snowy and icy conditions. Read on for information about how to winterize your car and deal with deteriorating driving conditions.



### Prepare before heading out

- Before leaving on a winter trip, go to [www.cotrip.org](http://www.cotrip.org) or call 511 for road information. This will help you plan a safe route and help you decide if you need to delay your travel.

### Get your car ready

Make sure you have an emergency kit in your car. A typical winter emergency kit includes:

- a shovel
- windshield scraper and small broom
- flashlight
- battery powered radio
- extra batteries
- water
- snack food
- matches
- extra hats, socks and mittens
- First aid kit with pocket knife
- Necessary medications
- blanket(s)
- tow chain or rope
- road salt and sand
- booster cables
- emergency flares
- fluorescent distress flag

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**Department of Public Safety**  
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Electra Bustle, Chief of Staff

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**Mission**  
Provide leadership and support to Colorado communities to prevent, protect, mitigate, respond and recover from all-hazard events including acts of terrorism.

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In addition, FEMA suggests checking the following items in your vehicle (consult a mechanic if your knowledge of these items is limited):

- Antifreeze level – ensure it is sufficient to avoid freezing.
- Battery and ignition system – should be in top condition and battery terminals should be clean.
- Brakes – check for wear and fluid levels.
- Exhaust system – check for leaks and crimped pipes and repair or replace as necessary.
- Fuel and air filters – replace and keep water out of the system by using additives and maintaining a full tank of gas.
- Heater and defroster – ensure they work properly.
- Lights and flashing hazard lights – check for serviceability.
- Oil – check for level and weight. Heavier oils congeal more at low temperatures and do not lubricate as well.
- Thermostat – ensure it works properly.
- Windshield wiper equipment – replace wiper blades, repair any problems and maintain proper washer fluid level.
- Install good winter tires. Make sure the tires have adequate tread. All-weather radials are usually adequate for most winter conditions. However, some jurisdictions require chains or snow tires with studs.

### Driving tips

- Drive for conditions – slower speeds, slower acceleration.
- Use your headlights.
- Do not use cruise control.
- **Four-wheel and all-wheel vehicles do not stop or steer better on ice.**
- Leave extra room between your vehicle and the vehicle in front of you. Remember, the larger the vehicle, the longer the stopping distance.
- If you find yourself behind a snowplow, stay behind it until it is safe to pass. Remember that a snowplow driver has a limited field of vision. Stay back (15 car lengths) until you're sure it is safe to pass or until the plow pulls off the road.
- On multi-lane roadways, snow plows often need to clear the center, throwing snow, ice and slush into nearby lanes. If approaching an on-coming snow plow, slow down and give the plow a little extra room.

### Winter weather facts

- **Wind chill** is a calculation of how cold it feels outside when the effects of temperature and wind speed are combined. A strong wind combined with a temperature of just below freezing can have the same effect as a still air temperature about 35 degrees colder
- A **winter storm watch** indicates that severe winter weather may affect your area
- A **winter storm warning** indicates that severe winter weather conditions are definitely on the way.
- A **blizzard warning** means that winds of 35 mph or more with snow and blowing snow reducing visibility to less than one-quarter mile for three hours or more

## If you become stranded

- Pull off the highway. Turn on hazard lights and hang a distress flag or brightly colored cloth from the radio antenna or window.
- Remain in your vehicle where rescuers are most likely to find you. Do not set out on foot unless you can see a building close by where you know you can take shelter. Be careful; distances are distorted by blowing snow. A building may seem close, but be too far to walk to in deep snow.
- Run the engine and heater about 10 minutes each hour to keep warm. When the engine is running, open a downwind window slightly for ventilation and periodically clear snow from the exhaust pipe. This will protect you from possible carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Exercise to maintain body heat, but avoid overexertion. In extreme cold, use road maps, seat covers, and floor mats for insulation. Huddle with passengers and use your coat for a blanket.
- Take turns sleeping. One person should be awake at all times to look for rescue crews.
- Eat regularly and drink ample fluids to avoid dehydration, but avoid caffeine and alcohol.
- Be careful not to waste battery power. Balance electrical energy needs - the use of lights, heat, and radio - with supply.
- Turn on the inside light at night so work crews or rescuers can see you.

## For more information

- General preparedness information – [www.readycolorado.com](http://www.readycolorado.com)
- Colorado Department of Transportation road conditions – [www.cotrip.org](http://www.cotrip.org)
- Winter storms and extreme cold - <http://www.ready.gov/winter-weather>
- Washington Department of Transportation winter driving tips - <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/winter/>
- Ready Wisconsin tips for putting together a winter survival kit - <http://ready.wi.gov/winter/HowToMakeAKit.asp>



## Frostbite and hypothermia

- **Frostbite** is a severe reaction to cold exposure that can permanently damage its victims. A loss of feeling and a white or pale appearance in fingers, toes, or nose and ear lobes are symptoms of frostbite.
- **Hypothermia** is a condition brought on when the body temperature drops to less than 90 degrees Fahrenheit. Symptoms of hypothermia include uncontrollable shivering, slow speech, memory lapses, frequent stumbling, drowsiness and exhaustion.
- If frostbite or hypothermia is suspected, begin warming the person slowly and seek immediate medical assistance.