DRIVING SAFELY IN WINTER

Are you prepared?

A practical guide for the driver, the vehicle and the journey.

Winter brings shorter daylight hours, frost, fog and headlamp glare. Thoughtful preparation helps us stay safe and confident and keep enjoying the independence that driving brings.

THE DRIVER	THE VEHICLE	THE JOURNEY

01 The Driver

Check the person behind the wheel

Eyesight. Have an eye test every two years, or sooner if advised or your vision changes. NHS sight tests are free in England for people aged 60 or over. Mention any difficulties in driving at dusk, headlamp glare and spotting pedestrians in dark clothing.

Driving standards. For car driving, you must be able to read a number plate at 20 metres, have visual acuity of at least 6/12 in the Snellen scale using both eyes together (or your only seeing eye) and have an adequate field of vision. Wear glasses or contact lenses if required for driving. Always ask your optician about fitness to drive and any DVLA notification required. You are responsible for notifying DVLA when required.

Mobility. Can you comfortably turn your head at junctions and operate the pedals confidently? Seek professional advice about stiffness or restricted movement. Bulky coats and wet or heavy footwear can make control more difficult.

Medicines. Only drive if you feel rested and well. Check with your pharmacist or GP about cold remedies, new prescriptions, dose changes and interactions that might impact fitness to drive. Remember to mention any supplements. Do not take someone else's prescription.

The legal position. You must not drive if medicine affects your ability to drive safely. A medical defence may apply to exceeding certain drug limits when medicine was prescribed or supplied for medical purposes and taken as directed, including advice about driving. It does not cover impaired driving. Ask your pharmacist or GP about your medicines and any condition that needs reporting to DVLA. Do not stop prescribed treatment without advice.

Skills and confidence. Refresh your Highway Code knowledge. A supportive mature driver review, in your own car, can offer practical pointers and reassurance. This may be especially helpful for your first winter with an EV or hybrid. To maintain skills keep driving regularly, sharing the driving if a couple

ASK YOURSELF Is there anything about my eyesight, mobility, medicines, knowledge or skills that I should check?

02 The Vehicle

Give your car a winter check

Battery. Ask your garage to check the condition of your battery, particularly if it is more than five years old or you mainly make short journeys. EVs and hybrids also have a low-voltage battery that needs checking. Battery failure is the number one reason for breakdown callouts.

Lights. Check headlights, rear lights, brake lights, fog lights, and indicators. Have headlight alignment checked. Check your daytime running lights to see if your rear lights are unlit. Use dipped headlights in poor visibility and check how your automatic lights behave. Use fog lights only when visibility is seriously reduced, generally below 100 metres, and switch them off when it improves.

Tyres. Check pressures at least every two weeks, when cold, using the manufacturer's settings. Inspect the whole tyre, including inner edges, for wear, cuts and bulges. The legal minimum tread for cars is 1.6 mm. Road safety organizations such as AA recommend replacement at around 3 mm due to an increase in braking distance as tread depth reaches the legal limit.

Tyre age and type. The four-digit date code on the sidewall of a tyre shows the week and year of manufacture. Tyre manufacturers advise replacement by ten years, even with tread remaining; due to degrading of the trye compound and structure. Ask a tyre specialist whether all-season or winter tyres suit your car and journeys. Check country requirements before travelling abroad.

Glass and fluids. Clean windows inside and out. Replace smearing wipers; thaw frozen blades before operating them. Use screen wash rated for expected temperatures. Check coolant and antifreeze servicing requirements with your garage.

Frost and snow. Allow extra time. Clean door seals and treat them with silicone spray to avoid doors being frozen shut. Clear all windows, mirrors, lights and number plates; remove snow from the roof. Clear cameras and sensors gently as directed in the handbook to ensure driving assistance systems function correctly. Grit the area around your car and home charger to reduce ice forming.

Misting. Remove damp coats, boots and umbrellas and place a silica de-humidifier bag in the cabin. Use the demister, heated screens and air conditioning as your handbook advises. If available, preheat an EV or plug-in hybrid while connected to the charger. Never set off without clear all-round visibility.

ASK YOURSELF **Are the battery, lights, tyres, wipers and fluids ready, and can I see clearly all around?**

03 The Journey

Choose the safest time and a comfortable route

Timing. Could a lunchtime visit replace an afternoon trip that now ends after dark? Avoid rushing and allow time to clear and demist the car. Plan breaks on longer journeys.

Weather and roads. Check the forecast and warnings for the whole route, including the return journey. Consult local road and gritting information. A gritted road can still be icy; salt needs time and suitable conditions to work. Watch for changed speed limits: a safe winter speed may be much lower than the limit.

A comfortable route. The quickest route suggested by a sat nav may include awkward junctions. Use maps and Street View to look at unfamiliar junctions in advance. Could another route offer an easier turn? CrashMap shows recorded injury-collision locations that require additional vigilance.

Fuel and charging. Carry enough fuel or battery charge for delays and diversions. EV range is reduced in cold weather, and cold batteries can charge more slowly. Identify backup chargers. If fitted, use the battery preconditioning as the handbook advises; this may be activated by selecting a compatible rapid charger in the car's navigation system.

Reduce distractions. Set the sat-nav while parked. If you miss a turn, let it recalculate. Explain to grandchildren why you need to concentrate and provide them with an activity bag to keep them occupied. Restrain dogs suitably with a harness, guard or crate.

Prepare for delay. Securely stow in the car a charged phone, charging lead or power bank, breakdown service documents, torch, blanket, high-visibility clothing, warning triangle, drinking water, energy bar and a first-aid kit. Carry essential medicines you may need if delayed.

Tell someone. For an unusual or longer journey, share your route and expected arrival time. Tell the person expecting you that weather could change your plans.

A plan to change plans. Decide what would make you adapt, delay or cancel. Turning back or postponing in worsening conditions is good judgement. Consider another driver or alternative transport when that would make a journey easier.

ASK YOURSELF Have I chosen a suitable time and route, checked the return forecast and prepared to change my plans?

04 Winter Road Conditions

Create time and space before a difficult moment develops

Following distance. Highway Code recommends leaving at least a two-second gap in good conditions on faster roads, at least four seconds in the wet and more when visibility or grip is poor. Stopping distances on ice can be ten times those on dry roads. If someone fills your gap, ease back and rebuild it. Drive so you can stop within the distance you can see and have time to take evasive action.

Ice and frost. Watch out for an ice sign. This identifies shaded stretches, bridges and exposed roads which may freeze early and thaw late. Avoid abrupt braking, acceleration or steering.

Rain and potholes. Puddles can hide potholes. If you cannot avoid a pothole reduce speed and keep a firm grip on the steering wheel. If the steering feels light through standing water, ease off the accelerator and avoid sharp steering or braking while grip returns. Report road defects through Gloucestershire's FixMyStreet service. This service is also available nationally.

Flood water. Do not assume it is shallow or follow another vehicle through. The air intake on cars is mounted low and water can be ingested into the engine. Water just a foot deep can float a vehicle. EVs and hybrids are also vulnerable to flood damage. Turn around safely and use another route.

Wind and poor visibility. Give cyclists, motorcyclists and high-sided vehicles extra room in gusty conditions. In heavy rain, hail or fog, slow down and leave more space. If you cannot see well enough, stop somewhere safe and lawful until conditions improve.

Low winter sun. Keep suitable sunglasses within reach and use the visor without blocking your view. Slow down and watch carefully for pedestrians and cyclists hidden by glare. Stop safely if you cannot see clearly; remove sunglasses when the light fades.

Headlamp Glare

Reduce the effects. Keep your windscreen and glasses clean and scratch-free. Discuss having clear or prescribed lenses with an anti-reflective coating with your optician. Yellow-tinted night-driving glasses have no proven safety benefit and reduce the light reaching your eyes. Use the rear-view mirror's dipping function if needed.

If dazzled. Slow gently and, if necessary, stop safely until you can see clearly. Monitor automatic high-beam systems and dip manually when if needed, including for pedestrians and cyclists. Seek an eye test if glare is becoming harder to manage.

ASK YOURSELF Am I leaving enough room, adapting early and spotting people who may be difficult to see?

05 If You Break Down

Know what to do before you need to do it

The safest action depends on where you stop and whether everyone can leave safely. Read the Highway Code and discuss any support needs with your recovery provider before travelling.

On a motorway or other high-speed road. If possible, leave at the next exit or reach a service area. Otherwise move left into an emergency area, lay-by or hard shoulder if you can. Switch on hazard lights. A hard shoulder still carries risk.

If you can leave safely. Use the side furthest from traffic, usually the left. Keep everyone well away from traffic and the vehicle, behind a barrier where safe. Check for drops, uneven ground and debris. Keep children under control. Pets must remain in the vehicle. Do not return to the car because it is cold or raining. Do not attempt repairs or place a warning triangle on a motorway.

If you cannot leave safely. If stranded in a live lane, or have disability or limited mobility which prevents safe exit, remain belted in with hazard lights on and call 999 immediately, asking for the police. Use the vehicle's SOS button if available. Explain your location and who needs assistance.

Get help. Use the emergency telephone if available and contact your recovery provider. On a high-speed road, the Highway Code advises calling 999 if you cannot exit or are not near an emergency telephone. Explain any mobility, medical or communication needs. Keep medical and emergency contact details accessible.

On other roads. Pull off the road into a safe place if possible. Turn on hazard lights. Assess whether it is safer to leave and wait away from traffic. Put a warning triangle at least 45 metres behind only if safe; never put yourself at risk. Call 999 for immediate danger or a medical emergency.

Give your location. Provide the road, direction and nearest junction or landmark; quote marker posts where available. A phone mapping app or what3words can help.

☑ 06 Choose One Useful Action

Today, choose one check. This week, complete it or book the appointment. Then share the idea with a friend or family member.

- ☐ **THE DRIVER** Eyesight • mobility • medicines • skills and confidence
- ☐ **THE VEHICLE** Battery • lights • tyres • clear windows • winter kit
- ☐ **THE JOURNEY** Forecast • timing • route • charge or fuel • backup plan

Useful links

Winter driving webinar 31 October 2026
Updated 1 November 2026

Select a named link below to open the website. The links are grouped to help you find advice about the driver, the vehicle and the journey.

The driver

Driving eyesight rules

NHS free sight tests and optical vouchers

Specsavers signs of age related eye problems

NHS physical activity guidelines for older adults

Age UK exercises for older adults

British Heart Foundation chair based exercises

Drug driving and prescribed medicines

DVLA medical conditions and driving

The Highway Code and updates

IAM RoadSmart Mature Driver Review

The vehicle

AA tyre tread and safety advice

RAC checking tyre tread

Kwik Fit how to identify tyre age

Continental tyre types

Kwik Fit types of tyre explained

The journey and winter road conditions

AA route planner

CrashMap recorded injury collisions

Met Office forecasts

Met Office weather warnings

Met Office weather app

Flood warnings for England

Gloucestershire roads and winter travel information

Report Gloucestershire road defects using FixMyStreet

FixMyStreet for reporting problems elsewhere in the UK

Met Office driving in severe weather

National Highways travelling in rain

RAC driving in heavy rain and floods

The Flood Hub driving in flood water

Breakdowns and emergency information

Highway Code breakdowns and incidents including disabled drivers

National Highways motorway safety and breakdown advice

what3words location app

what3words how to give your location in an emergency

Hidden Disabilities Sunflower scheme

National Highways Sunflower scheme for your vehicle

Lions Message in a Bottle information and ordering

The Forum and keeping in touch

Older Drivers Forum Gloucestershire and local information

Older Drivers Forum Gloucestershire on Facebook

Older Drivers Forum national Facebook page

Older Drivers Forum Gloucestershire on X

Gloucestershire Older Persons Association

Support the Forum on JustGiving

To donate by bank transfer, please email odfglos@gmail.com for our bank details. Thank you for supporting our voluntary work.

These notes cover ordinary car driving in Great Britain. Follow your vehicle handbook and seek individual advice on health, medicines and fitness to drive. Check destination rules before driving abroad.

Older Drivers Forum Gloucestershire operates under Gloucestershire Older Persons Association (GOPA), registered charity 1124977.
For local events and enquiries: odfglos@gmail.com.