

Road conditions



The British weather is famed for being unpredictable. It doesn't tend to be as severe as warmer or colder climates, but drivers still need to be prepared for all possible conditions.

Keeping an eye on weather forecasts and alerts can be useful, a positive outlook doesn't guarantee roads will be in good condition or that there won't be traffic jams (see our page on route planning for guidance about avoiding these). Only vital journeys should go ahead when risky driving conditions are predicted or evident.

If a journey must be taken when conditions are hazardous, only experienced drivers, who have appropriate knowledge and training, in vehicles that won't be especially vulnerable to the potential hazards (high-sided vehicles can be knocked over by strong winds) should be sent out, equipped with appropriate tools and supplies for an emergency.

Key actions to take in poor driving conditions

Poorly maintained, damaged and soft road surfaces

- Keep an eye out for potholes, particularly after cold and wet weather, and avoid them as much as possible, or else risk loss of control and damage to the vehicle.
 - After hitting a pothole, it may be worth pulling over somewhere safe as soon as possible to check the tyres and pay attention to any difference in the steering.
- Take it very slow when travelling down roads with uneven or sandy or gravelly surfaces and keep both hands on the steering wheel to maintain control.
- Be aware that a road surface might be softer than usual if it is, or has recently been, very hot and this may mean tyres won't grip it as well as usual and steering may be affected.

Snow and ice

- Use dipped headlights when driving through falling snow.
- Be wary of skidding and losing control, even if the road is treated.
- Make stopping distances ten times longer than usual.
- Use the gearbox in manual vehicles to slow down by braking smoothly and gently.
- Drive slowly using the highest gear possible. When driving automatics, use the winter setting (if there is one) as this will help reduce wheel spin.
- Make acceleration, steering and braking as gentle as possible.
- Try to stay on fresh snow as this will provide more resistance than compacted tracks left by a previous vehicle.

Winter and low sun

- Keep the windscreen and windows clean to prevent dazzle.
- Use the sun visor and keep a pair of sunglasses (with up-to-date prescription lenses, if required) handy.
- Slow down and drive more cautiously than usual since it may be more difficult to differentiate brake lights from sun glare or spot vehicles, pedestrians and obstacles in the distance where it's especially bright.

Fog

- Drive slowly and use dipped headlights.
- Use front and rear fog lamps if visibility is seriously reduced (and switch them off when conditions improve).
- Avoid driving close to another vehicle so you can follow its lights – it gives a false sense of security. Bright fog lamps mask turn and braking signals and your stopping distance will be reduced, making you more likely to rear-end the other vehicle.
- Be cautious of breaks in the density and don't increase your speed suddenly – fog is often patchy.

Rain

- Give more time to think and slow down safely by at least doubling stopping distances as it can take longer to come to a stop when the road is wet.
- Use dipped headlights and slow down as spray can reduce visibility and, at night, the glare from headlights will be worse.
- Ease off the accelerator, slow down gently and don't brake harshly if you find yourself aquaplaning (when tyres lose grip on a wet surface).

Hail

- Slow down and use dipped headlights.
- Drive gently and carefully after a hail storm as the road is likely to be slushy.
- Prevent property and vehicle damage during hail storms by following our weather guidance.

Flooding

- Do not cross flood water unless you're certain it isn't too deep (i.e. won't reach the engine).
 - If you do find yourself driving through a flood (in a manual vehicle), go slowly in first gear to avoid stalling the engine, keep revs up and slip the clutch.
 - Where it's safe to do so, and you have a clear view ahead, try and stay in or near the centre of the road, as it's likely the water will be shallowest there.
- Test the brakes (and help them dry) by using them gently after crossing through floodwater. Only return to usual speed when you're sure the brakes are working normally and it's otherwise safe to do so.
- Limit the damage caused to vehicles and other property by flooding by considering the key actions within our weather guidance information.