



Focus On Safety — Cool Tips for a Safe Summer Trip

There are many great things about summer but few can match the fun of a family vacation road trip. Families, friends, colleagues—we all start talking about where to go this summer. Families make plans to spend time together – that trip to the shore, the cabin in the mountains, camping at the lake. Friends start lining up their days off to take that long-talked about fishing trip or head to that rented beach house.

Whatever getaway you plan, before you hook up that new boat or camper, or before you put your family or friends into your car, SUV, pickup, or RV, take the time to review some summer road travel safety tips. Prevention and planning are much easier than dealing with the consequences of a breakdown, or worse yet, a highway crash.

Before You Go

Regular maintenance such as tune-ups, oil changes, battery checks, and tire rotations go a long way toward preventing breakdowns before they happen. If your vehicle has been serviced according to the manufacturer's recommendations, it should be in good shape and ready to travel. If not — or you don't know the service history of the vehicle you plan to drive — schedule a preventive maintenance check-up with your mechanic now.

Providing your vehicle is well maintained, getting it ready for a road trip is relatively quick and easy. However, it's important to perform the following basic safety checks before you go:

Vehicle Safety Checklist

Tires — *Air pressure, tread wear, spare*

The best way to avoid a flat tire, or an even more frightening experience, a blowout, is to check your vehicle's tire pressure at least once a month—and don't forget to check your spare. A tire doesn't have to be punctured to lose air. All tires naturally lose some air over time. In fact, under-inflation is the leading cause of tire failure.

If your vehicle is a truck, van, or SUV, monitoring your tire pressure is critical to your safety. These vehicles have higher centers of gravity and are more prone to rollover than cars when their tires fail. If your vehicle and/or its tires are older, you need to exercise special care with regard to tire inflation and tire condition (including worn out treads or obvious damage), particularly in warm weather.

When towing a trailer, it is important to know that some of the weight of the loaded trailer is transferred to the towing vehicle. If you are towing, make sure you inflate your tires to the recommended pressure. You can check the tire information placard or your

owner's manual for the maximum recommended load for the vehicle, and the correct tire pressure.

Check the air pressure in all your tires, including the spare. To get an accurate reading, check pressure when tires are cold, meaning they haven't been driven on for at least three hours. It's a good idea to keep a tire pressure gauge on hand in your vehicle for this purpose. You can find the correct pressure for your tires listed on a label inside the driver's doorframe or in the vehicle owner's manual — **the correct pressure is NOT the number listed on the tire itself.**

Also, take five minutes to inspect your tires for signs of excessive or irregular wear. If the tread is worn down to 1/16 of an inch, it's time to replace your tires. Use the Lincoln's head penny test, or look for the built-in wear bar indicators to determine when it's time to replace your tires. Place a penny in the tread with Lincoln's head upside down and facing you. If you can see the top of Lincoln's head, you are ready for new tires. If you find irregular tread wear patterns, it means your tires need rotation and/or your wheels need to be realigned before you leave. For more information on tire safety and pressure, visit the "Tires" section of www.SaferCar.gov, a vehicle safety resource of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Belts and Hoses — *Condition and fittings*

Look under the hood and inspect all belts and hoses to make sure they are in good shape with no signs of blisters, cracks, or cuts in the rubber. High summer temperatures accelerate the rate at which rubber belts and hoses degrade, so it's best to replace them now if they show signs of obvious wear. While you're at it, check all hose connections to make sure they're secure.

Wiper Blades — *Wear and tear on both sides*

After the heavy toll imposed by winter storms and spring rains, windshield wipers are likely to be ragged from use and ready to be replaced. Like rubber belts and hoses, wiper blades are susceptible to the summer heat. Examine your blades for signs of wear and tear. If they aren't in tip-top condition, invest in new ones before you go.

Cooling System — *Coolant levels and servicing*

Carefully check your coolant level to make sure it's adequate. In addition, if it's time to have your cooling system flushed and refilled (or even nearly time), have it done now. On a long road trip in summer heat, you'll want your cooling system functioning at peak performance to avoid the possibility of your engine overheating.

Fluid Levels — *Oil, brake, transmission, power steering, coolant, and windshield washer fluids.*

Periodically you'll want to check your vehicle's oil level. And as with coolant, if it's time or even nearly time to have the oil changed, now would be a good time to do it. In addition, check the following fluid levels: brake, automatic transmission, power steering,

windshield washer, and coolant. Make sure each reservoir is full and if you see any sign of fluid leakage, take your vehicle in to be serviced.

Lights — *Headlights, brake lights, turn signals, emergency flashers, interior lights, and trailer lights.*

See and be seen! Make sure all the lights on your vehicle are in working order. Check your headlights, brake lights, turn signals, emergency flashers, and interior lights. Towing a trailer? Be sure to check your trailer lights including brake lights and turn signals too. Failure of trailer light connections is a common problem and a serious safety hazard.

Air Conditioning — *AC check*

Check AC performance before traveling. If you're traveling with someone sensitive to heat, you may also want to make sure your AC system is functioning properly. Lack of air conditioning on a hot summer day affects people who are in poor health or are sensitive to heat, such as children and seniors. If the air is not blowing cold, have the system repaired before you go because emergency on-the-road repairs can be more costly than those you plan in advance.

Protect the Children

If you're traveling with children, find out how to best keep them safe. Make sure car seats and booster seats are properly installed and that any children riding with you are in the car seat or booster seat best suited to protect them. All children 13 and younger should ride in the back seat. And remember, all passengers in your vehicle should be buckled up!

Click on NHTSA's [child passenger safety recommendations](http://www.nhtsa.gov/cps/cpsfitting/index.cfm) to find out how to select the right car seat for your child. To learn more and find a free inspection site near you, please visit <http://www.nhtsa.gov/cps/cpsfitting/index.cfm> to locate a certified technician to assist you.

Summer Safety Alert!

There are other dangers to children in and around cars that you should know. One of those dangers is hyperthermia, or heat stroke, from being left unattended in a parked vehicle. Never leave children alone in the car—not even at the convenience store with the engine running. Vehicles heat up quickly – even with a window rolled down two inches, if the outside temperature is in the low 80s°, the temperature inside the vehicle can reach deadly levels in only 10 minutes.

Vehicles can be a danger to children even if they are not in the vehicle. Make sure you walk around your vehicle before you get in it and back out of a driveway or parking spot. At that summer campground, park, near the beach, children can be running and playing—totally oblivious to a vehicle. As a driver, know that every vehicle has a blind

zone. As the size and height of a vehicle increases, so does the blind zone area. Large vehicles, trucks, SUVs, RVs, and vans, are more likely to be involved in backovers than cars because they have the largest blind zones.

Make sure to lock vehicle doors at all times when not in use. Children may enter vehicles on their own because the vehicle was unlocked or the keys were left out and accessible. Many incidents can happen as a result of an unlocked vehicle.

Visit <http://www.safercar.gov/parents> to find out more about how to keep children safe from “nontraffic” hazards, including heat stroke, backover, power windows, vehicle rollaway, seat belt entanglement, and trunk entrapment.

Remember that long trips can be especially tough on children. Stopping along the way makes the trip easier and less tiring for them as well — and more of an adventure, too. Bring along a few favorite books or soft toys to keep the little ones content and occupied. The trip will seem to go faster for them, perhaps lessen the number of times they ask, “Are we there yet?” and let you keep your attention on driving better.

On The Road

The best way to stay focused while driving is to avoid fatigue. Schedule your trip to allow for frequent breaks. Stopping for food or beverages, taking time to pull over at a rest stop just to stretch your legs, staying overnight at a motel or local bed-and-breakfast, and sharing the driving are all good strategies for avoiding fatigue and staying alert behind the wheel.

Share The Road

Warmer weather attracts different types of roadway users, including motorcyclists, bicyclists, and pedestrians.

Motorcyclists, bicyclists and pedestrians are vulnerable road users; they do not have the protection of a car or truck, and collisions almost always result in injury.

If you expect to see motorcycles, you are more likely to detect them. Often we filter out things we don't expect to see. Look for motorcycles - especially at intersections.

Motorcycles are much lighter than other vehicles and can stop in much shorter distances. This means that when you are following a motorcycle, you should leave more distance. If the rider has to make an emergency stop, the bike will stop in a much shorter distance than your vehicle.

When you see a motorcycle approaching, realize that it's easy to misjudge the speed because the size of the motorcycle and the fact that it is coming towards you makes it difficult to estimate speed.

Pedestrians are just as vulnerable as motorcyclists and bicyclists. Things to remember as a driver:

- You can encounter pedestrians anytime and anywhere - even in places where they are not supposed to be found.
- Pedestrians can be very hard to see - especially in bad weather or at night. You must keep a lookout and slow down if you can't see clearly.
- Stop for pedestrians who are in a crosswalk, even if it is not marked. When you stop for a pedestrian in a crosswalk, stop well back so that drivers in the other lanes can also see the pedestrian in time to stop.
- Cars stopped in the street may be stopped to allow a pedestrian to cross. Do not pass if there is any doubt.
- Don't assume that pedestrians see you or that they will act predictably. They may be physically or mentally impaired - or drunk.
- When you are turning, you often will have to wait for a "gap" in traffic. Beware that while you are watching for that "gap", pedestrians may have moved into your intended path.
- Be especially attentive around schools and in neighborhoods where children are active. Drive there like you would like people to drive in front of your own home.

Avoid Bad Driver Behaviors

Distracted Driving

The focus of any driver, at all times, should be driving. Nearly 80 percent of crashes and 65 percent of near-crashes involve some form of driver distraction. Distracted driving can be anything that pulls your attention away from driving. The most obvious forms of distraction are cell phone use, texting while driving, eating, drinking, talking with passengers, and using in-vehicle technologies and portable electronic devices.

Set down some safety rules with your co-drivers before you hit the road. These rules should include refraining from activities that take your eyes and attention off the road. Insist that your co-drivers agree to make every effort to move to a safe place off of the road before using a cell phone—even in an emergency.

Buckle Up America. Every Trip. Every Time.

Everybody aboard must agree to wear their seat belts every time they are riding or driving in your vehicle. If you're not buckled up, you could be thrown through a window or into other passengers, sent skidding along the pavement, or be crushed under a vehicle in a crash. Wearing a seat belt is also the best defense against a drunk-driving related crash.

Drunk Driving

Every 51 minutes and 32 times a day, someone in the United States dies in an alcohol-impaired-driving crash. Be responsible and don't drink and drive. If you plan to drink, choose a designated driver before going out.

Emergency Roadside Kit

Even a well-maintained vehicle can break down, so it's advisable to put together an emergency roadside kit to carry with you. A cell phone tops the list of suggested emergency kit contents since it allows you to call for help when and where you need it. Suggested emergency roadside kit contents:

- Cell phone
- First aid kit
- Flashlight
- Flares and a white flag
- Jumper cables
- Jack (and ground mat) for changing a tire
- Work gloves and a change of clothes
- Basic repair tools and some duct tape (for temporarily repairing a hose leak!)
- A jug of water and paper towels for cleaning up
- Nonperishable food, drinking water, and medicines
- Extra windshield washer fluid
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