

Take a few minutes before you leave to make sure you are prepared for the drive.

Safe driving in winter conditions

By Helen Plischke

While B.C. seemed to slowly creep into winter this year, seasonal driving conditions suddenly switched gears in late October, especially outside of Metro Vancouver and southern Vancouver Island.

Whether you're driving on the highway or in the city, if you drive as part of your job, you need to be prepared for snow, rain, fog, and reduced daylight. While your chances of being injured or killed in a crash dramatically increase during B.C.'s winter driving season — which usually runs from October 1 to April 30 — there are ways you can reduce the risks.

Do your research

Checking weather and road conditions at drivebc.ca (or by calling toll-free 1.800.550.4997) and planning the timing of your trip before setting off is one of the most important ways to be a safer winter driver, says Trace Acres, program director for Road Safety at Work. “A lot of us are guilty of (not doing) this. We want to get somewhere, and we don't check the

conditions. But we need to ask ourselves, ‘Do I have to go today?’ Or, ‘What are the conditions like in the next few days?’ If there is a blizzard today and not tomorrow — go tomorrow.”

Follow these rules to plan ahead:

- Know before you go by checking the route you plan to take.
- Give yourself extra time and plan to arrive later than you would in fair weather.
- Be prepared to postpone the trip if the weather or road conditions are poor.

“Think and be deliberate about slowing everything down in hazardous conditions.”

—Trace Acres, program director for Road Safety at Work

Drive to road conditions

Be prepared to adjust your driving. Everything behind the wheel should be done more slowly in the winter, including braking and accelerating, Acres says. “Think and be deliberate about slowing everything down in hazardous conditions.”

Drive below the posted speed limit and leave at least four seconds of distance between you and the vehicle in front of you.

Prepare your car and have the proper equipment

In B.C., it’s easy to start a trip where the weather is mild and quickly end up in the mountains where there is a freezing snowfall. During winter months, always have warm clothing — a coat and boots, at least — available in your vehicle in case you have to get out where the weather is poor. Avoid stopping on the roadside if at all possible. Instead, find a safe place well away from traffic. Also, be sure to have first aid supplies and an emergency kit on hand.

Prepare your vehicle for winter conditions with winter wiper blades and a full windshield washer reservoir.

See and be seen

Make sure your windows are clear of fog on the inside before you set out. On the outside, make sure all the snow is swept from the car, including the roof,

headlights, and taillights. Scrape the frost from all the windows. Make sure all lights, including ones on a trailer, work properly.


Have the right tires

Many B.C. highways require vehicles to have winter-rated tires between October 1 and April 30. (March 31 in some locations.) There are also requirements for chains for commercial vehicles, depending on gross vehicle weight (GVW). Watch for road signs explaining the rules.

Winter-rated tires have the three-peaked mountain and snowflake symbol on the wall of the tire. All-season tires with the M+S (Mud and Snow) symbol are also acceptable. All tires must be in good condition with at least 3.5 mm of tread.

Employers have a role to play by making safe winter driving a part of their workplace health and safety program, says occupational health and safety consultant Wendy Sieben. “The onus is on employers to show leadership and ensure their employees know how to mitigate the risks involved in winter driving.”

For more information, search “Winter driving” on worksafebc.com and visit the following websites:

- <https://roadsafetyatwork.ca/resource/webinar/shift-into-winter-practical-bc-winter-driving-tips/>
- ShiftIntoWinter.ca 

Tire types



Tires displaying the three-peaked mountain and snowflake symbol are the preferred winter-rated tire. They offer the best traction and a shorter stopping distance in cold temperatures, snow, rain, and on ice.



Tires displaying the all-season symbol (Mud + Snow) meet B.C.’s requirements, but they do not perform as well in cold weather as winter tires.

What the regulators say

Non-commercial vehicles must use winter-rated tires on designated highways



When travelling outside of Greater Vancouver and Greater Victoria:

- **Light commercial vehicles** (less than 11,794 kg GVW) must use winter tires or carry chains. Best practice is to use winter tires and carry steel chains or other traction devices.
- **Large commercial trucks** (more than 11,794 kg GVW) must carry steel chains.



For more information, visit the provincial government’s webpage to read about [designated winter tire & chain routes](#).