



by Karen Stephens

Winter Auto Travel Safety and Emergency Response Tips

Fall is the time to prepare your car and family for upcoming winter travel. Planning ahead helps you cope if driving emergencies arise.

Obtain first aid and CPR training so you can provide loved ones with immediate help. And whether driving from home to child care or cross-country, take the steps below for safer winter travel. For your children's sakes, don't put it off.

Prior to travel departure and return, check out road conditions. Contact your area's Department of Transportation or their web site. In case emergency workers need to find you, keep aware of road signs you pass so you know what state or city you're near.

As you travel, keep windshield fluid full and never let your gas gauge go below a half a tank. Take extra caution to drive defensively; especially avoid tailgating and be alert to unexpected icy patches on bridges or shaded roadways.

In your glove compartment, keep reference materials such as: personal identification for all travelers, medical insurance cards, auto insurance card, and auto car registration. Include instructions for responding to health concerns travelers may have. Keep state and city maps, and destination phone numbers on hand. Let people at your destination know of your travel route and schedule. Include this column to remind you of signs and treatment of hypothermia or frost bite (see end.)

Emergency Auto Supplies

Below are supplies to keep in your trunk or within easy access during winter auto travel:

- **Communication tools:** Cell phone with power adapter; coins or calling card for phone calls. Phone numbers of towing company, insurance company, family members.
- **Lighting and alerts.** Flare, flashlight, or reflectors to alert other drivers of your location; bright cloth to hang on antenna or side mirror to alert others that you need help.
- **Food:** Non-perishable items: nuts; dried fruit such as raisins; sunflower seeds, dry cereal; granola bars; even candy bars.
- **Water:** Bottled water or thermos of drinking water; clean, empty coffee can for melting snow for water, candles and matches or lighter for melting snow in a can.
- **Protective clothing:** Boots, snow suit, water repellent mittens or gloves, hats, ear muffs.
- **Newspapers:** It's a great insulator for body heat when placed under clothing.
- **Protection from weather:** Blankets or sleeping bag. ("Space" blankets are very thin, but effective. Ask your auto or sporting store about them.)

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- **Auto first aid kit:** First aid manual, gauze pads or strips, adhesive tape, safety pins, bandages, blunt-tipped scissors, tweezers, paper or cloth towels, liquid soap, disposable latex gloves, pen light.
- **Emergency auto supplies:** Flashlight with batteries; fire extinguisher; basic tool kit (pliers, screwdriver, adjustable wrench); jumper cables; windshield fluid with de-icer; snow shovel; ice scraper; snow brush; sand or kitty litter or strips of carpet for tire traction when stuck; pocket knife; long rope.
- **Items to occupy children:** Paperback books, crayons, paper or coloring book, simple crossword puzzles.

Let people at your destination know of your travel route and schedule.

Emergency Response Tips

Hopefully an emergency never befalls your family, but if it does, keep these tips in mind:

- **If an accident occurs:** Turn off ignition. Call 911 for help or flag down another car or bystander. Check to see if anyone is injured. If qualified, provide first aid until emergency medical service workers arrive to treat injuries.
- **If you're stranded:** Stay in your auto until help arrives. Don't leave the car and risk becoming disoriented or overexerted in a storm. (If you must leave the car, tie a rope to your waist and car so you won't become lost in "white-out" snow conditions.) If it isn't snowing, raise your auto hood to show you need help. If you're certain your car's exhaust pipe isn't blocked, run the motor for ten minutes each hour. When doing that, lower windows slightly to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning. Exercise arms, legs, fingers, and toes occasionally to keep blood circulating and to stay warm.
- **Hypothermia and frostbite:** Hypothermia results when the body's temperature gets dangerously low. It can occur when you're out too long in very cold weather. Wet clothing increases risk of hypothermia. Cold, pale skin and uncontrollable shivering are hypothermia's first symptoms. Later symptoms include slower pulse, drowsiness, and exhaustion.

Hypothermia requires emergency response. Stop additional heat loss and slowly warm the body core first. Dress a hypothermia victim in dry clothing and wrap in a blanket covering head and neck. If necessary, use your own body to warm the victim's.

Frostbite, the freezing of skin and body tissue, occurs if parts of the body — especially feet, hands, face, and ears — are not well protected. Frostbite makes body parts feel tingly, numb, stiff, or rubbery. Affected areas first turn red and then begin to appear pale white, grayish-yellow, or blue. Final stages of frostbite can include blistering.

When suspecting frostbite, call for emergency help and treat symptoms of hypothermia first. Then treat frostbite by warming affected areas slowly with warm breath or by running warm (not hot) water over them. Or you can soak areas in a tub of warm water (104 to 108 degrees Fahrenheit). Don't massage or rub the frozen area or you may further damage skin tissue.

About the Author — Karen Stephens is director of Illinois State University Child Care Center and instructor in child development for the ISU Family and Consumer Sciences Department. For nine years she wrote a weekly parenting column in her local newspaper. Karen has authored early care and education books and is a frequent contributor to *Exchange*.

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