

Safety First

Motor vehicle crashes are the number one cause of death of children and young adults in America. About one in three Americans will be injured or killed in a motor vehicle crash.

One in three.

Chances are good that you will be in a motor vehicle crash sometime in your life. It does not matter how good a driver you are. You can never predict when a crash might happen.

This chapter explains motor vehicle safety laws. It also gives tips on how to avoid serious trouble.



CHAPTER 3

Passenger Vehicle Safety

Passenger vehicles, including vans and pickup trucks, must have working safety equipment. Each passenger vehicle must have all of the following:

- A safety belt for the driver and all passengers
- A mirror
- A horn
- A lock for the engine's ignition
- Windshield wipers
- An exhaust muffler
- A foot brake and a parking brake

Each passenger vehicle must also have lights for driving in the dark. There must be two approved white headlights in the front, two approved red lights in the back, and directional signals. The vehicle must also have three red stop (brake) lights in the back and a small white light above the back license plate.

The Highway Assistance Patrol (HAP) provides help to stranded drivers. It is operated by the MassDOT-Highway Division and sponsored by MAPFRE | Commerce Insurance.

For more information, visit <http://www.massdot.state.ma.us/highway/TrafficTravelResources/EmergencyRoadsideAssistance.aspx>

If the directional signals or brake lights on your vehicle stop working, you must have them fixed right away. Until they are fixed, you must use hand signals when turning or slowing (see Chapter Four for hand-signal diagrams).

Every vehicle must pass an annual safety and emissions inspection. For details, see Chapter Six.

A passenger vehicle may have a spot light that can only be used to read signs or as an emergency light if the headlights are not working. A spot light can only shine two feet above the roadway 30 feet away from your vehicle.

Emergency lights (flashing, rotating, oscillating, or strobe lights) are not allowed on a vehicle unless you get a permit from the RMV.

Some equipment and changes to your vehicle are illegal. For more information, see Chapter Six.

Glass tinting is allowed on passenger vehicles, but there are restrictions. You can darken your side and rear windows up to 35 percent. It is illegal to tint your windshield.

Safety Belt Law

In 2015, 9,874 people who were not wearing a safety belt were killed in crashes in the United States.

Massachusetts law requires every person in a passenger motor vehicle (including vans and small trucks under 18,000 lbs.) to wear a safety belt or sit in a child passenger restraint.

- Any driver who is not wearing a safety belt can be fined \$25. Any passenger 16 years old or older who is not wearing a safety belt can be fined \$25.

- A driver can also be fined \$25 for each passenger age 12, 13, 14, or 15 who is not wearing a safety belt.

You can only get a fine for the safety belt law when you are stopped for a traffic violation. The following people do not need to wear safety belts:

- Drivers and passengers of vehicles made before July 1966
- Drivers of taxis, liveries, tractors, buses, and trucks with gross weights of 18,000 pounds or more (However, drivers of some commercial motor vehicles do need to wear safety belts.)
- Passengers of emergency vehicles and drivers of police and fire vehicles
- An employee of the U.S. Postal Service who is driving a motor vehicle while working
- A person who physically cannot wear a safety belt because of a disability. A physician must certify that the person has this disability.



An air bag works better if you are wearing your safety belt.

A crash can happen any time. The best way to protect yourself is to always wear your safety belt. Safety belts save lives for both drivers and passengers.

Child Passenger Restraints

Infants and small children must sit in federally approved child passenger restraints until they...

1. Are at least eight years old **or**
2. At least fifty-seven inches tall

Children at least eight years old or at least fifty-seven inches tall must wear safety belts. The safety belts must be used correctly. You can be fined \$25 for breaking this law.

The child restraint must have a sticker that says it meets the necessary standards (U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard No. 213 or the standards in 49 C.F.R. 571.213). The restraint must be permanently attached to a motor vehicle or attached by a safety belt or an attachment system.

Never put a back-facing child safety seat in the front passenger seat if your vehicle has an air bag for that seat.

The safest place for a child to sit is in the back seat. The back middle seat is best. Infant seats must face the back of the vehicle.

To find a certified Child Passenger Safety Technician to help attach a child safety seat, call 1-877-392-5956 or go to www.mass.gov/highwaysafety.

Use your child's height and weight to pick the right safety seat. Each seat is different. Check the manufacturer instructions for exact height and weight limits.



Guide to Child Safety Seats

Infant seat	up to 20 pounds
Toddler convertible seat	20–40 pounds
Booster seat	40–80 pounds

How Safety Belts Work

Safety belts stop you from being thrown around or out of your vehicle in a crash. It is best to wear both lap and shoulder belts. When worn correctly, safety belts lower the chance of death or serious injury in a crash by about 50 percent.

In a crash, a safety belt can help in many ways.

- **Stop you from hitting the windshield, dashboard, steering wheel, or other hard parts of the vehicle.**

Your vehicle will stop moving if it crashes head on. If you are not wearing a safety belt, your body will keep moving until it hits something hard, like the windshield. Your safety belt will stop you from hitting the windshield or other passengers.



The *right* way to wear a safety belt.



The *wrong* way to wear a safety belt.

- **Stop you from being thrown out of the vehicle.**

Lap and shoulder belts keep you protected inside your vehicle. This makes your chance of surviving a crash five times better.

- **Help you stay seated and in control of the vehicle.** When you wear a safety belt, you can stay behind the wheel and avoid a worse crash. The safety belt will stop you from being pushed across the seat.

Hitting the windshield at 30 mph is like falling from the third story of a building and hitting the pavement.

A lap belt should fit low, tight, and flat over the hips. It should not be twisted. A shoulder belt should be worn across the shoulder and chest. A shoulder belt should never be worn under the arm or across the face or neck.

Myths About Safety Belts

Safety belts save lives and prevent injuries in a crash. Stories about the “dangers” or “hassles” of safety belts are simply not true.

“I’ll be trapped inside the car if I’m wearing a safety belt in a crash.”

Cars don’t catch fire or sink in water very often. If it does happen, wearing a safety belt helps you not hit your head and lose consciousness. If you stay conscious, you can undo your safety belt and get out. Even if you’re upside down, it takes less than a second to undo your belt.

“My car has air bags, so I don’t need to wear a safety belt.”

An air-bag is made to work with safety belts, not instead of them. You still need to wear a safety belt when you drive. Front air bags are only made for head-on crashes and do not protect you in crashes from the side or back.

“I’m only driving a short distance. I don’t need to wear my safety belt.”

Most motor vehicle crashes happen less than 25 miles from home. Eight out of ten crashes happen at speeds of 40 mph or less. Don’t take chances. Always wear your safety belts.

“I’m only going to the store. It’s too much trouble to put kids in child safety seats.”

Motor vehicle crashes are the easiest cause of child death to prevent. Most kids killed in car crashes would have lived if they were properly put in child safety seats. Take the extra minute to put your children into their seats before driving.

Air-Bag Safety

When used with lap and shoulder safety belts, air bags are very good at saving adult lives. You should follow these procedures with air bags.

- *Children in back.* Infants in back-facing child safety seats should never be in the front seat of a vehicle with a passenger-side air bag. Children are always safest when riding in the back seat.
- *Child safety seats.* Infants and young children should always sit in child safety seats that are right for their age and size. For more information, see the *Child Passenger Restraint Law* section earlier in this chapter.
- *Air bags do not replace safety belts.* You should always wear both lap and shoulder belts. For more information, see the *Safety Belt Law* and *How Safety Belts Work* sections of this chapter.
- *Move the front seat back.* You should move the driver’s seat and front passenger seat as far back from the dashboard as you can. This is safer and makes it easier to drive.

These tips will help you **and your children** survive a crash.

Children and small pets are often killed or injured when they are crushed by adults not wearing safety belts during a crash.

Inside the Vehicle

In your vehicle, nothing should get in the way of your ability to see, react, or drive.

Distracting Objects

You cannot have anything inside your vehicle that can prevent you from driving safely. Nothing inside your vehicle, on your dashboard, on your windshield, or hanging from your rear view mirror can block your view of the road in front of you or through your mirrors. Make sure that nothing can roll under your feet and get in the way of your pedals (the accelerator, clutch, and brake).

Mobile (Cell) Phones and CB Radios

For information on the use of mobile (cell) phones and other mobile electronic devices, see the *Distractions Due to Mobile (Cell) Phone Use* section on the next page.

Headphones

It is illegal to wear a radio headset, headphones, or any other wired or wireless device that restricts your attention to the environment while driving. If you are 18 or older, you can use one earplug for use with a cell phone.

Televisions

Any television installed in a vehicle must be behind the front seat and not visible to the driver. A driver cannot be distracted by a television screen, even when looking sideways out of the vehicle.

Truck Beds

Children under 12 years old are not allowed to ride in the beds of pickup trucks (there are very limited exceptions, and never at speeds more than five mph).

Distractions Due to Mobile (Cell) Phone Use

Sending or Reading Electronic Messages

You cannot use any mobile electronic device to write, send, or read an electronic message (including text messages, emails, instant messages, or accessing the Internet) while driving. This is the law for all drivers.

Mobile (Cell) Phone Use by Drivers Under 18

Drivers under 18 cannot use any mobile electronic device for any reason while driving. The only exception is for reporting an emergency.

Unsafe or Impeded Operation Due to the Use of a Mobile (Cell) Phone

Drivers over 18 can use cell phones for calls if they always keep one hand on the steering wheel. However, you cannot let this interfere with your driving and you cannot use your cell phone for texting.

Negligent Operation and Injury from Mobile (Cell) Phone Use

It is a crime to injure a person or damage property because of negligent driving. If you crash because you were using a mobile electronic device, you will face criminal charges and lose your license.

What is a Mobile Electronic Device?

The law (Chapter 155 of the Acts of 2010) defines a "mobile electronic device" as any hand-held or other portable electronic equipment capable of providing data communication between two or more persons, including, without limitation, a mobile telephone, a text messaging device, a paging device, a personal digital assistant, a laptop computer, electronic equipment that is capable of playing a video game or digital video disk, equipment on which digital photographs are taken or transmitted or any combination thereof, or equipment that is capable of visually receiving a television broadcast; provided, however, that mobile electronic device shall not include any audio equipment or any equipment installed, or affixed, either temporarily or permanently, in a motor vehicle for the purpose of providing navigation or emergency assistance to the operator of such motor vehicle or video entertainment to the passengers in the rear seats of such motor vehicle.

Note: Federal regulations restrict the use of hand held mobile (cell) phones while operating a commercial motor vehicle.

Driving Defensively

Even experienced drivers make mistakes. At some point, you will have to deal with equipment failures, bad weather, unskilled drivers, unpredictable pedestrians, and drivers who ignore traffic laws.

To prepare for unpredictable events, you should always **drive defensively**.

- Always keep good vision in front and around your vehicle.
- Stay alert and prepared for the unexpected.
- Keep your eyes on the road. Taking your eyes off the road even for a split second to look at a passenger or object inside your car can be very dangerous.
- Keep a safe distance around your vehicle.
- Drive at the right speed and know when to slow down and stop.
- Always wear your safety belt.
- Do not drive if you have been drinking, are on medication, or are very tired.
- Keep your vehicle in good working order.
- Obey the rules of the road and give the right-of-way when appropriate.

Always look ahead of and around you, and check your mirrors often. Be aware of road conditions and possible hazards in front, to the sides, and behind you.

- Look at everything in front of you. Look for vehicles stopping and watch for people getting in or out of parked vehicles. Pay close attention to pedestrians or bicyclists sharing the road with you.
- Expect mistakes from other drivers.
- Watch for back-up lights of vehicles ahead of you.
- Pay close attention to crosswalks. Don't rely on traffic signals. Other drivers, bicyclists, and pedestrians may ignore traffic signals.
- Always pay close attention near playgrounds, schoolyards, and shopping centers. Children, pedestrians, and bicyclists may be hidden from sight.
- Be aware that pedestrians, bicyclists, and other drivers may not hear you. This is especially important in crosswalks and parking lots. One out of every five individuals of driving age is Deaf or Hard of Hearing.
- Remember that right-of-way is something you give. A big part of driving defensively is giving the right-of-way to prevent unsafe traffic situations.

Your Health and Physical Condition

Have your eyesight checked every year or two. Fix any vision problems immediately. As you get older, your vision may get worse, or it may become harder to see at night.

You must always stay alert and in control of your vehicle. You need good vision and, if your hearing has become diminished, you need to be even more visually alert to anticipate changing driving conditions. You should never drive in the following cases:

- When you have been drinking alcohol

- When you have taken any prescription drug or over-the-counter medication that can cause drowsiness
- If you are under the influence of any drug
- When you are very tired
- When you are upset. Emotions like anger and depression can cause you to drive carelessly

On bright, sunny days, you should always wear sunglasses.

Checking Your Vehicle's Condition

Your passenger vehicle or motorcycle must be inspected for safety and emissions every year (see *Chapter Six*). Always follow the maintenance procedures recommended by your vehicle manufacturer. Every time you enter your vehicle or mount your motorcycle, make a quick visual check for low tire pressure or damage.

Brakes and Tires

Pay close attention to changes in your vehicle when braking. If you think you have a problem, have your brakes inspected immediately. If you feel the vehicle pull to one side when you brake, your brakes may need adjustment or repair.

Check your tires for proper inflation and wear. Rotate your tires as often as recommended by the vehicle or tire manufacturer. It is dangerous and illegal to drive a vehicle with extremely worn or damaged tires. Tires must have at least $\frac{2}{32}$ inches of tread depth in the proper grooves and no fabric breaks or exposed cords.

The distance between the edge of a penny and the top of Lincoln's head is about $\frac{2}{32}$ of an inch. A quick way to check your tire tread is to slide a penny into a tread groove. If you can see the top of Lincoln's head, your tires are worn out.

Steering

Your steering wheel should not feel loose. There should not be a delay between when you turn the wheel and your tires respond. With power steering, you should check the fluid level regularly. If your vehicle makes a high-pitched noise when you turn, you should have your power steering inspected.

Lights and Glass

Check your headlights, brake lights, and turn signals regularly. Keep your lights clear of dirt, snow, and ice. Keep your windows and mirrors clean. Change your windshield wipers if they streak or fail to clear your windshield properly.

Safe Distances Around Your Car

Always keep enough space between your vehicle and others to give yourself room to stop safely or avoid hazards.

- Use the "two-second" rule to keep a safe distance from the vehicle in front of you. Pick an object in front of you, like a sign post or a tree. When the vehicle in front of you reaches that object, count out "one one-thousand, two one-thousand.....". If you reach

the object before you count two, you are too close. Slow down until you've put enough distance between you and the other vehicle.

The two-second rule is a minimum safe distance for good road conditions and moderate traffic. Count three or four seconds for added safety and when traffic allows.

- Keep more space behind a motorcycle than you would for another vehicle.
- Keep more space between your vehicle and heavy equipment (for example, dump trucks, tractors).
- Never cut in front of heavy equipment or tractor-trailers. These vehicles carry more weight and need much more space to stop safely.
- Never tailgate a vehicle in front of you. Tailgating is illegal and the main cause of rear-end crashes. The fine for tailgating can be as high as \$100.
- If a tailgater is behind you, move to another lane or pull to the side of the road to let the tailgater pass.

Allow extra space for bad drivers and the following situations:

- Blind driveways or obstructed-view driveways or roads
- Drivers backing out of parking spaces or driveways
- Children playing in yards or near the road

Braking and Stopping

Look far ahead so you have enough time to brake and stop safely. The time it takes you to react, think, and hit the brakes is called reaction time.

It takes about three-quarters of a second to react to a situation and step on the brake pedal. This time is also measured in feet traveled, or reaction distance.

At 50 mph, your vehicle will go another 55 feet in the three-quarters of a second it takes to react. Once you hit the brakes, you may go another 160 feet or more before you stop.

This is your average braking distance on dry, level, clear pavement.

Your total stopping distance is about 215 feet (55 feet + 160 feet). If road conditions are not clear and dry, your stopping distance will be more.

If your brakes and tires are working and the road is dry and level:

- At 60 mph, it takes about 292 feet (almost a whole football field) to react to a hazard, step on the brake, and safely stop.
- At just 30 mph, your total stopping distance will be about 104 feet.

These numbers are only for educational purposes, to show that motor vehicles need much more distance to stop safely than you may imagine. Actual stopping distances change with road, weather, and vehicle conditions.

Sample stopping distance statistics from *How to Drive, A Text for Beginning Drivers* by the American Automobile Association (Ninth Ed.) The white boxes are the reaction time distance and the black boxes are how far the vehicle travels after you hit the brakes.

MPH	Stopping Distance	Total
		59 ft.
		156 ft.
		292 ft.
Total Stopping Distance		

Follow these useful braking tips:

- Warn pedestrians, bicyclists, or other drivers of possible trouble. Brake early and gently when preparing to stop or turn.
- Do not let your foot rest on the brake pedal while driving. (This is called riding your brakes.)
- If your vehicle has antilock brakes, never pump the brakes. (In 2010, 89% of new cars and 99% of new light trucks had antilock brakes.)
- Always slow down near a curve or an area where you cannot see clearly ahead.

Using Your Horn, Headlights, and Emergency Signals

It is important to know how to use your vehicle's safety equipment.

Use your horn to:

- Warn pedestrians or other drivers of possible trouble
- Avoid crashes

Do not use your horn to:

- Show anger or complain about other drivers' mistakes
- Try to get a slower driver to move faster
- Try to get other vehicles moving in a traffic jam

You must use your headlights and taillights: (* new law in 2015)

- From one-half hour after sunset until one-half hour before sunrise
- *When you cannot clearly see people or vehicles 500 feet ahead due to insufficient light or weather conditions
- *Whenever you use your windshield wipers (daytime running lights are not sufficient)
- In rain, snow, fog, or other weather that makes it hard to see
- Anytime you have trouble seeing other vehicles
- To alert another driver to turn on his/her headlights
- While driving through a tunnel

Use emergency lights and signals when your vehicle breaks down, so other drivers can see it. Move your vehicle as far to the side of the road as you can. For your own safety, stay off the road. Never change a flat tire in a traffic lane. Wait for help to arrive.

You can also use your emergency lights to warn drivers behind you about a traffic crash or hazard. Give other drivers as much warning as possible.

Night Driving

Night driving is more dangerous than daytime driving. Vehicles, pedestrians, and obstacles may be harder to see. Always be extra careful at night. You must use your headlights from one-half hour after sunset until one-half hour before sunrise. You should do the following when driving at night:

- Do not drive when you are tired or drowsy.
- Drive more slowly at night, especially in an unfamiliar area. Keep a speed that will let you react and stop safely within the distance you can see ahead.
- Keep more space between your vehicle and other vehicles.
- Put your inside rearview mirror in the "night" position. This will reduce the glare from headlights behind you. Keep inside lights off.
- Do not look straight at headlights. Look to the lower right side of your lane.
- Keep your windows and headlights clean.
- If another driver flashes headlights at you, your headlights may be off or your high beams may be on.

High Beam Headlights

High beam headlights normally let you see about 350 feet ahead. Low beam headlights normally let you see about 100 feet ahead.

- Only use high beams in dark areas where you cannot see the road surface ahead.
- You must lower your high beam headlights to low beam when you are within 500 feet of an oncoming vehicle or within 200 feet of a vehicle traveling ahead of you.
- If a driver is coming toward you with high beams, you may flick your headlights to remind the driver to change to low beams. If the driver does not change to low beams, stay to the right and do not turn on your high beams.

Driving in Rain or Fog

Rain and wet roads make it harder to start, stop, and turn. Hard rain, fog, and mist can also make it more difficult to see. **The law now requires you to use your headlights and taillights whenever you use your windshield wipers. Daytime running lights are not sufficient.**

Slow down as soon as the rain starts. Many roads are most slippery when rain first mixes with road dirt and oil and forms a greasy film. If a road is slippery, your tires can lose traction and your car can hydroplane.

Hydroplaning is caused by road conditions, water, and speed. It happens when your tires are riding on water and have no contact with the road. If your vehicle starts to hydroplane, you're driving too fast. Slowly step off the gas pedal. Never hit the brakes or turn suddenly. You may lose control and skid.

Following are some tips for driving in rain or fog:

- Make more space between your vehicle and others. You need more space to stop your vehicle. Be prepared to stop quickly and within the distance you can see ahead.
- Be careful of wet leaves on the road. They can be as slippery as ice.
- Keep your windshield wipers and window defoggers in good condition.
- In fog, use your low beam headlights to reduce glare.
- Always use your turn signals.
- If you cannot see the pavement or sign posts, slow down and look for road edge markings to guide you.
- Do not drive through puddles. Wet brakes do not work right. If you drive through a large puddle, apply your brakes lightly as soon as you can to dry them until you feel them working normally again.

The Highway Division has a 511 phone service. You can use this to get up-to-date information about traffic and weather conditions and construction projects. You can also report problems on the road. Service is available 24/7.

Dial 511 from your cell phone or 617-986-5511 (Metro-Boston), 508-499-5511 (Central Mass), or 413-754-5511 (Western Mass) from a landline.

For more information, visit <http://www.massdot.state.ma.us/highway/TrafficTravelResources/About511Massachusetts.aspx>

Winter Driving

Driving in winter is difficult and dangerous for new and experienced drivers. Motor vehicles run very differently on ice and snow than on warm, dry pavement. You should practice driving in winter weather.

- Lower your speed. Drive carefully and accelerate slowly.
- Never lock your brakes on icy roads. You will lose steering control. If you skid, remember to **turn into the direction of the skid** (see *Driving Emergencies* in *Chapter Five*).
- Make more space between your vehicle and others. You need more space to stop safely on slippery surfaces.
- Be alert for emergency vehicles and yield to plows. Do not crowd plows.
- Bridges and highway overpasses freeze before the rest of the road and can be very slippery. This is because the ground does not insulate them.
- If it is snowing, start slowly. Test your brakes by tapping them gently to see how much traction your tires have.
- Keep your windshield wipers and defroster in good condition.
- Remove ice and snow from your vehicle before driving. Clear all windows, windshield wipers, headlights, and brake lights. It is very important that you clear the roof so ice and snow does not blow into vehicles behind you. If you do not, you can be charged with negligent operation.
- Keep your gas tank at least half full to prevent the gas line from freezing.

- Keep your windshield washer filled with cleaning fluid that won't freeze.
- Keep a blanket, flashlight, and small shovel in your trunk.

Pedestrians

One in five motor vehicle deaths involve a pedestrian. Take extra care to look for pedestrians. Pay close attention in busy areas with a lot of pedestrians. Be extra careful of:

- **Children** – Children are unpredictable and hard to see. Be careful near school zones, parks, bus stops, and playgrounds.
- **Joggers and Skaters** – Joggers and skaters do not always obey traffic signal and crosswalk rules.
- **Pedestrians, when you're backing up** – Be careful when backing up. Do not just use vehicle mirrors or sensors. Blind spots may hide people or objects behind the vehicle. You should turn your head and look out the window before you start to back up. If children are nearby, get out of your vehicle and check behind it.
- **Visually impaired (blind) individuals** – Always stop for a blind pedestrian at a street crossing. Remain stopped until the person has safely crossed. Do not honk or wave the person on. Never pass another stopped vehicle. Blind pedestrians may use a white cane or a guide dog. The White Cane Law requires you to stop completely for a blind pedestrian crossing a street.
- **Deaf or Hard of Hearing individuals** – It is impossible to visually identify someone who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing. Do not assume that a pedestrian, bicyclist, or other driver can hear your car and will yield or move out of the way. It is always safer for you to yield, even if you have the right of way, than it is to create an unsafe condition.

If you would like information on assistive listening and adaptive devices used by Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals, contact the Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing at www.mass.gov/mcdhh or call 617-740-1600.

- **Train and bus stops** – Pay close attention at and near mass transit stops, where pedestrian traffic may be heavier.
- **Senior centers** – Pay close attention in areas where there are more elderly pedestrians, such as around senior centers and senior residences. Seniors may have diminished eyesight and reduced hearing, mobility, and reaction times.

Remember that you must slow down and stop when necessary for a person walking in the street. Always look ahead for places where pedestrians may be hidden, such as around a curve, at the top of a hill, or between parked cars.

Bicycles and Mopeds

Bicyclists and moped riders have the same right to use public roadways as all other drivers (the only exceptions are limited-access or express state highways with posted signs saying bicycles and mopeds are not allowed).

They must obey the same traffic control and right-of way laws. These riders can be hard to see in traffic and are not well protected against being hit by vehicles.



When passing a bicycle or moped:

- Lower your speed. The wind caused by your vehicle can throw a rider off balance.
- Leave a lot of room between your vehicle and riders.
- If you don't have enough room to pass safely, wait for oncoming traffic to pass or for the lane to get wider.

Dim your headlights at night if a bicyclist is coming toward you. Be aware that a bicyclist or moped rider might need to swerve suddenly, just like any other driver. Always respect the rights of a bicyclist or moped rider to use the roadway, as you would respect the rights of another driver.

When parked on the side of a road, always check carefully for bicycles or mopeds before opening your vehicle door. See the *Danger of Open Doors to Bicyclists* section on page 111 for more information.

Motorcycles

Check Twice, Save A Life • Motorcycles Are Everywhere

Motorcycles are motor vehicles, just like cars and trucks. The number of motorcycles registered in Massachusetts keeps getting higher. The riding season usually goes from March through October, but some motorcyclists ride all year. Be aware of motorcycles and share the road safely.

Motorcycles go as fast as cars and trucks. Riders face extra dangers caused by weather and road conditions. Motorcycles do not have the safety features of an automobile and the risk of injury in a crash is much higher.



It is illegal for a motorcycle operator to weave between lanes at any time.

- **Changing lanes** – On the highway, pay extra attention when you change lanes or merge. Motorcycles can be hidden in blind spots because of their size. Always check your mirrors and blind spots for motorcycles. Signal early, and check twice before changing lanes.
- **Following Behind** – Leave extra space between your vehicle and a motorcycle in front of you. Use a four-second following distance (compared to a two-second for other motor vehicles).
- **Sharing lanes** – Motorcycles have the same right to use the full width of a lane. Even though a motorcycle may use a smaller part of the lane, you must never share a lane. Motorcyclists need to move within a lane for traffic maneuvers and to avoid road debris, potholes, or surface oil. **Never move into the same lane space as a motorcycle, even if the lane is wide and the motorcyclist is riding to one side.** Crowding into a lane with a motorcycle is illegal and very dangerous.
- **Turning at Intersections** – Cars or trucks turning left in front of an oncoming motorcycle cause a lot of crashes. Pay extra attention to motorcycles at intersections. Motorcycles are smaller and can be hidden by other vehicles. It can be hard to judge their speed and position. Even if you have enough time to turn, an oncoming motorcyclist may not have time to safely change speed. Let the motorcycle safely pass through the intersection first.
- **Road and Weather Conditions** – Road conditions that are only small problems for cars and trucks can be big hazards for motorcycles. Gravel, potholes, and slippery

surfaces can cause a motorcyclist to change speed and direction suddenly.

Motorcycles need more distance to stop in bad weather. Always give a motorcycle extra space in case it needs to stop suddenly.

Follow these tips and share the road safely with motorcycles and other motor vehicles.

Motorcycle Safety

The RMV has a Motorcycle Manual. You must read it before you apply for a motorcycle license. The Motorcycle Manual has detailed information on motorcycle equipment, operation, riding gear, carrying passengers, and rules of the road.

The Motorcycle Manual is available online at www.mass.gov/rmv.

Every motorcycle must pass an annual safety inspection. For details, see *Chapter Six*.

Rider Training

The Registry of Motor Vehicles sponsors the Massachusetts Rider Education Program (MREP). Beginner and experienced rider courses are available. If you pass either course, you do not need to take a motorcycle road test to get your motorcycle license.

For information on motorcycle rider courses, or to speak to the program coordinator call 857-368-2903. You can also visit www.mass.gov/rmv.

Motorized Bicycle (Moped) Safety

A moped (also known as a motorized bicycle) is a pedal bicycle with a helper motor, or a non-pedal bicycle with a motor. Its maximum speed must be thirty (30) miles per hour (mph) or lower. Its cylinder capacity must be fifty (50) cubic centimeters or lower. It must have an automatic transmission.

You must have a valid driver's license (any class) or learner's permit to drive a moped. You must follow these rules when driving a moped:

- Do not drive faster than 25 mph.
- Do not ride on limited-access or express state highways with signs saying that bicycles are not allowed.
- Use the correct electronic and hand signals before stopping or turning.
- Do not ride on off-street recreational paths (you can use bicycle lanes along roads).
- Drivers and passengers must wear helmets that meet or exceed the US DOT standard.
- Obey all traffic laws and regulations.

You can be fined up to \$100 for a violation of any of these rules

Motorized Scooter Safety

A motorized scooter is any two or three-wheeled vehicle with handlebars and an electric or gas motor that can move the vehicle with or without human propulsion. Motorized scooters can either be designed for the driver to sit or stand.

The Registry of Motor Vehicles will not register motorized scooters.

You must have a valid driver's license (any class) or learner's permit to operate a motorized scooter. You can be issued tickets for violating motor vehicle laws.

You must follow these rules when driving a motorized scooter:

- Do not drive faster than 20 mph.
- Do not drive on limited-access or express state highways.
- Wear a helmet that meets or exceeds the US DOT standard.
- Always stay to the right side of the road, even when passing another vehicle.
- Use the correct electronic and hand signals before stopping or turning.
- Do not drive after sunset or before sunrise.
- Do not carry any passengers.
- Obey all traffic laws and regulations.

You can be fined up to \$25 (1st Offense); \$25-\$50 (2nd Offense); \$50-\$100 (3rd + Offense).

All fees are subject to change at any time.

Limited Use Vehicle Safety

A limited use vehicle can have two or more wheels. It can go faster than 30 mph, but not more than 40 mph. A limited use vehicle can either be a motorcycle or a passenger vehicle; it depends on how many wheels it has.

You must have a valid driver's license or learner's permit to drive a limited use vehicle. If the limited use vehicle is a motorcycle, the license or permit must be Class M. If the limited use vehicle is a passenger vehicle, the license or permit must be Class D.

You cannot drive a limited use vehicle on a limited-access or express state highway or any road with a speed limit faster than 40 mph.

Low Speed Vehicle Safety

A Low Speed Vehicle (LSV) has four wheels and can only go between 20 and 25 mph. It must have a gross weight rating lower than 3,000 lbs.

You must have a valid Class D driver's license or learner's permit to drive a low speed vehicle.

You cannot drive a low speed vehicle on a limited access or express state highway or any road with a speed limit faster than 30 mph. Low speed vehicles may also not be allowed in areas with heavy traffic. You must obey all traffic laws and regulations. You can be fined for violations.

Bicycle Safety Laws

Bicycle safety laws have been updated in recent years to place more responsibility on bicyclists, motorists, and on renters of bicycles while giving police officers more training in bicycle safety and traffic enforcement. This should result in better awareness of safety concerns and enforcement of bicycle safety laws.

If a police officer sees a bicyclist commit a traffic violation, the officer can issue a citation the same way he/she would for a motorist. The bicyclist can be fined, but it will not affect his/her driving record. A bicyclist must give the officer his/her true name and address when asked and can be fined for not doing so. A bicyclist can also be arrested for refusing to give his/her name.

Companies that rent bicycles must offer helmets that meet all safety requirements for renters.

The law also allows motorists to be cited for a motor vehicle violation for certain behaviors around bicycles. This should encourage motorists to be more careful.

For a list of laws for bicyclists and laws for motorists in the presence of bicyclists, please see page 108.

