

9 Sharing the Road Safely - Be Courteous!

Drivers of all ages need to be concerned with traffic laws, courtesy, and safety. This section reminds you that you share the road with a variety of traffic such as commercial trucks, emergency vehicles, motorcycles, mopeds, bicyclists, and pedestrians. It is important to be patient with all who use the road. The material presented here will also help you understand how to drive in a manner that reduces the risk of a traffic crash and the risk of road rage.

Safe driving involves more than learning the basics of operating a vehicle and memorizing the rules of the road. Safe driving also requires good judgment and reflexes, experience, patience, and common sense.

A young driver's understanding and judgment may not be as well developed as an experienced driver's. Middle-aged drivers may grow complacent about their driving ability after years of driving. Older drivers have years of experience on the road, but may face challenges brought about by losses in vision, hearing, attentiveness, decision-making ability, or reaction time. Research indicates older drivers can improve their driving ability through additional training, enabling them to maintain their driver's license while driving safely. Some communities offer driving skill programs for older drivers.

Distracted Driving

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates driver distractions account for 25 percent to 30 percent of the 6.5 million crashes recorded nationally every year. Even seemingly simple tasks such as tuning a radio can be risky, especially in bad weather or heavy traffic. In the estimated quarter of a second it takes the brain to shift attention between two tasks, a car going 65 mph covers 24 feet.

Here are some ways you can minimize in-vehicle distractions:

Before driving:

- Designate a front-seat passenger to serve as a “co-pilot,” rather than fumble with maps or navigation systems. If you are driving alone, map out destinations in advance.
- Be familiar with equipment in the vehicle. Practice performing basic functions such as adjusting the temperature or radio settings without taking your eyes off the road.
- Preprogram your favorite radio stations for easy access and arrange tapes and CDs in an easy-to-reach spot.
- Ensure all children are comfortable and properly buckled up. Teach them the importance of good behavior and remaining buckled up while in a vehicle. Don’t underestimate how distracting it can be to tend to them in the car.
- Complete any personal grooming before you start driving or after you reach your destination.

While driving:

- Give priority to the task of driving. A momentary distraction can lead to a crash. Keep your hands on the wheel and your eyes on the road.
- Avoid using cell phones, text messagers, navigation systems, and other electronic devices.
- If you must use a cell phone, the best practice is to make your call while your vehicle is safely parked.
- Don’t take notes, read, or look up phone numbers.
- Avoid involved, stressful, or confrontational conversations.
- If you can’t avoid eating, choose easy-to-handle items and make sure all drinks are secured in cup holders.
- Take a break if you find yourself “lost in thought” or tired.

Tips for Sharing the Road When Driving

When driving, you'll share the road with pedestrians, bicyclists, trucks, farm tractors, and road repair and snow removal equipment. Keep the following guidelines in mind when driving:

- Be alert and use extra care when sharing the road with pedestrians, bicycles, motorcycles, and mopeds. They are small and hard to see. Keep in mind that children are especially unpredictable in their movements and may be hard to spot due to their small size.
- Watch for delivery and commercial vehicles that make frequent stops. Allow more following distance than usual.
- Check your vehicle mirrors and look over your shoulder for approaching traffic when pulling into traffic from curbside parking or driveways.
- Be alert and listen for all-terrain vehicles and snowmobiles and watch for signs warning of trails and crosswalks along the roadway.

Pedestrians

As a driver, watch out and always yield the right-of-way to people walking, jogging, biking, crossing a street in the middle of a block, or darting from between parked vehicles. Watch for them when entering a street from a driveway or alley, at stop signs, traffic signals, roundabouts, crosswalks, and intersections.

After a traffic light turns green, yield to people crossing a street or vehicles that may still be turning in front of you or crossing the intersection.

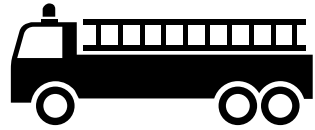
When there are no sidewalks, pedestrians should walk on the side of the road facing oncoming traffic. Parents should teach their children this, but drivers must watch for pedestrians.

Be alert for joggers who may be running along roadways. Joggers should wear reflective clothing, use sidewalks or roadway shoulders, and avoid jogging at night, dawn, dusk, or during bad weather. Joggers, like other pedestrians, should be on the side of the road facing oncoming traffic.



Blind Pedestrians

Michigan law requires you to stop or yield the right-of-way when you see a pedestrian with a white cane or guide dog. Only the blind may carry white canes. Avoid honking the horn or revving the engine; these noises are distracting and cover important audible cues used by the blind. Also avoid blocking designated crosswalks. This makes it especially difficult for a visually impaired or blind person to cross the street. It is also an inconvenience for others attempting to cross and violates the rule of always yielding to pedestrians.



Emergency Vehicles

Yield the right-of-way to an emergency vehicle that is approaching from any direction or has stopped when it is displaying flashing warning lights and/or sounding a siren or other audible warning. An authorized emergency vehicle includes:

- Ambulances, fire department and police vehicles, privately owned vehicles of volunteer or paid fire fighters if authorized by the chief of an organized fire department, privately owned motor vehicles of volunteer or paid members of a life-support agency licensed by the Department of Energy, Labor and Economic Growth if authorized by the life-support agency.
- A vehicle owned and operated by a federally recognized, nonprofit, charitable organization that is used exclusively for assistance during that emergency.
- A tow truck or wrecker with a flashing, rotating, or oscillating red or amber light that is clearly marked and readily recognizable as a vehicle used to assist disabled vehicles.

Failure to yield or exercise due caution when passing a stopped emergency vehicle is a civil infraction. In addition, it is a felony to injure or kill emergency personnel for failure to yield or exercise due caution when passing a stationary emergency vehicle. For more information about the points given for traffic convictions involving emergency vehicles, please refer to pages 39, 58 and 59.

When you see a stopped emergency vehicle:

- Slow down and move over a lane if possible. If traffic or other conditions prevent you from changing lanes, you must slow down and proceed with due caution.

When an emergency vehicle is approaching:

- Pull over to the edge of the roadway, clear of intersections, and stop.
- Remain there until the emergency vehicle has passed. Watch for others. There may be several other emergency vehicles.
- Keep a foot on the brake so the brake lights let emergency vehicle drivers know you have stopped.
- Stay at least 500 feet behind any moving emergency vehicle displaying flashing warning lights and sounding a siren.
- Never pass a moving emergency vehicle displaying flashing warning lights unless directed to do so by the emergency vehicle driver or a law enforcement officer.

Sharing the Road with Commercial Vehicles

When a commercial vehicle such as a truck or a bus collides with smaller vehicles, people in the smaller vehicles are much more likely to be severely injured or killed. An automobile driver needs to know the following:

- Commercial vehicle drivers cannot stop or maneuver their vehicles as easily as a passenger vehicle. They take longer to stop. An automobile traveling at 55 mph can stop in about 130 feet to 140 feet. A commercial vehicle traveling at the same speed takes 400 feet to stop.
- Commercial vehicle drivers may not be able to see vehicles alongside or close behind their commercial vehicles. Commercial vehicles have deep blind spots behind and on both sides. Stay out of their blind spots.



- Commercial vehicles need room to make right turns. They may swing wide to the left to safely negotiate a right turn.
- When you see a commercial vehicle with its right turn signal on at an intersection, know that the truck is going to make a wide right turn. Do not try to pass on the right-hand side or you might get squeezed between the truck and the curb. Stay behind trucks making right turns.

The factors above are the result of size and weight differences between the two types of vehicles, but vehicle size and weight do not cause crashes—drivers do. Remember to:

- Keep a safe distance behind a truck or bus. Following a commercial vehicle too closely greatly increases the chances of a rear-end collision. When your automobile is right behind a commercial vehicle, the driver cannot see it and it severely limits what you can see on the road ahead. Extend the distance between your vehicle and a commercial vehicle as weather or road conditions deteriorate.
- You increase the chances for a crash the longer you drive in the blind spots of commercial vehicles. A good rule of thumb is if you cannot see the commercial vehicle driver in the truck's side mirror, then the driver cannot see you.
- When following a commercial vehicle, observe its turn signals before trying to pass. Cutting in between a commercial vehicle and the curb or shoulder to the right may result in a crash. If the commercial vehicle appears to be starting a left turn, wait and verify which way the driver is signaling before passing on the right.
- Signal intended lane changes or turns well in advance. Never cut off a truck or bus, force it to slow down, or stop suddenly.
- Be careful when passing a truck or bus. Often, commercial vehicle drivers cannot see you. Allow enough time and distance to pass safely.

- Avoid passing or driving adjacent to larger vehicles in a roundabout.
- Always pass commercial vehicles legally on the left side and maintain a consistent speed when passing. Be sure you can see the entire cab of the truck in your rear view mirror before signaling and pulling in front of the commercial vehicle.
- Never cross behind a commercial vehicle that is preparing to back up or is backing up. Remember, most trailers are eight and a half feet wide and can hide a car completely, preventing the truck driver from even seeing your vehicle.
- Stay behind white stopping lines. White stopping lines are there for a reason. If you stop past the line, commercial vehicles will not be able to complete their turns without hitting you.
- When merging onto the freeway, commercial vehicles may not be able to move over, so match the flow of traffic as closely as possible, pick your spot, and go.
- When exiting the freeway, leave space between you and the vehicle behind you. Plan your move early and always signal your intentions as soon as possible.
- Be even more careful passing a truck with a trailer. Often, a driver must swing out to the left or right before making a turn. The driver may not see you and could force you off the road.
- Slow down if a truck or bus is passing you, especially during bad weather. Splash or spray from their tires can reduce visibility. Start your wipers before the vehicle passes.
- At night, use low beam head lights when following a truck or bus.

Tips for Motorcycle Operators

Motorcycle operators have the right to use a full traffic lane. Sometimes they may be forced from one side of the lane to the other by strong winds or a bumpy road.



It is important to remember that, because of the motorcycle's smaller size, motorcycles appear to be farther away than they really are, making it hard for other motorists to judge their speed. Any crash between a larger vehicle and a motorcycle almost always injures or kills the motorcyclist.

Motorcycle operators should use hand and arm signals even with their motorcycle's turn signals. For more information, obtain a *Michigan Motorcycle Operator Manual* from a Secretary of State office or visit the Department of State Web site.

Tips for Safe Motorcycling

- Get properly trained. Take a motorcycle safety course. Nearly half of all crashes involve riders that do not have a motorcycle endorsement, a valid driver's license, or both.
- Get your "CY" motorcycle endorsement on your license before you ride. It is the law.
- Choose a motorcycle that is suited to your size, experiences, and skill level.
- Both the motorcycle operator and passenger must wear an approved, properly fastened safety helmet. The safety helmet must meet U.S. Department of Transportation standards and be properly labeled.
- For protection, all motorcycle riders should wear gloves, reflective clothing, jackets and pants that cover arms and legs completely, and sturdy boots or shoes high enough to cover ankles. Bright colors and reflective materials will increase your visibility.
- When riding at 35 mph or more, motorcycle operators must use shatterproof goggles, a face shield, or windshield for eye protection. Eye protection is always recommended.

- About 30 percent of all motorcycle fatalities involve alcohol or drugs. Riding sober is the best way to keep safe on the road. Alcohol and drugs – including certain over-the-counter medications – can adversely affect your driving.

Tips for Sharing the Road with Motorcycles

- It is illegal to drive beside a motorcycle in the same traffic lane. However, two motorcycle riders may drive side by side in the same lane.
- Always treat motorcycle operators with courtesy.
- Leave plenty of extra space between your vehicle and a motorcycle ahead. Motorcycles can usually stop in shorter distances and may suddenly swerve to avoid obstacles.
- Pass as you would another vehicle, but not so fast or so close that your tires throw dirt or stones into the rider's face, or a draft from your vehicle blows the motorcycle about.
- Before changing lanes, check to see if a motorcycle is in the space where you plan to move. After you pass, look again before you move back into the other lane. Many motorcycle-vehicle crashes happen when drivers fail to check their blind spots before turning, changing lanes, backing up, or parking.
- When at intersections, watch for oncoming motorcycles and other small vehicles. Their smaller size makes it difficult to judge their distance and speed. Always exercise caution at intersections and allow motorcycles or other small vehicles to clear the intersection before beginning your turn.
- The single headlight or taillight of a motorcycle can blend into the lights of other vehicles. A single light in traffic may mean a motorcycle.
- When making left turns, be alert for possible oncoming motorcycles.

- Some motorcycles do not have self-canceling turn signals. So watch for clues such as motorcycle operators or passengers turning their heads to look behind, or motorcycle operators beginning to lean or tilt their vehicles.
- When coming up behind a motorcycle, slow down sooner than you would for other vehicles. Leave plenty of space.
- When pulling out of a side street, remember that an oncoming motorcycle is probably much closer and coming much faster than it appears.

Bicycles and Mopeds

Much of the advice about motorcyclists also applies to bicycle and moped riders. Bicycle and moped riders are allowed to ride in a traffic lane, but must stay as far to the right as practical, obey traffic signals, not ride more than two abreast in a single lane, and must ride in the same direction as other traffic.

Bicyclists entering a roundabout are encouraged to ride in the center of the lane, traveling at or near the speed of circulating traffic. Motorists who encounter bicyclists in a roundabout are urged to use caution, be courteous, and share the road.

A bicycle or moped ridden after dark must have a front headlight and rear reflector. But these may be hard to see. A person riding a bicycle on a sidewalk meant for pedestrians must yield the right-of-way to pedestrians and sound a horn or bell before overtaking and passing a pedestrian.

Watch the side of the road for slow-moving bicycles and mopeds without reflectors. Be ready to dim the headlights. While it is safer not to, you may drive beside a bicycle or moped in the same lane. Leave plenty of room. A rider may turn sharply to avoid something in the road or a door being opened from a parked vehicle.

The Michigan Vehicle Code does not require vehicles such as go-peds and electric scooters to be registered. Some municipalities have outlawed the use of go-peds and electric scooters on roads and sidewalks.

Although the law only requires moped riders under age 19 to wear approved, properly fastened safety helmets, *all* moped and bicycle riders should wear them as well as reflective clothing.

The Segway Scooter (Electric Personal Assistance Mobility Devices)

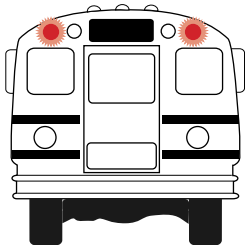
The Segway Scooter is an upright, self-balancing, two-wheeled device that is powered by an electric propulsion system. To operate the scooter, riders stand on the scooter's platform using handlebars for support and shift their weight to propel, steer, and stop. The Segway has a top speed of 15 mph.

Under Michigan law, Segway scooters must follow many of the same regulations involving bicycles and mopeds, including yielding right-of-way to pedestrians and prohibiting the scooter's use on sidewalks or roads if bicycle paths are available. Segway scooters cannot be used on roads with a speed limit of more than 25 mph. In addition, passengers are not allowed on Segway scooters and drivers must not carry any packages, articles, or objects that prevent them from keeping both hands on the scooter's handlebars. If the Segway scooter is ridden at night, it must be equipped with the same lights and reflectors as required on bicycles.

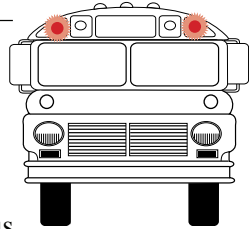
Michigan law also allows local municipalities to post signs in business districts or along waterfronts to further regulate the operation of Segway scooters based on the safety, health, and welfare of their residents. The Department of State does not title or register Segway scooters. For more information about the law and any local ordinances, please contact your local law enforcement agency.

School Buses: Alternately Flashing School Bus Lights*

With Overhead Red Lights Only



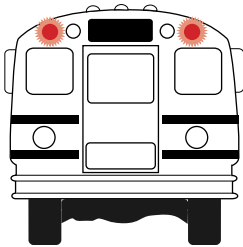
- Overhead red lights are flashing and bus is moving—prepare to stop.



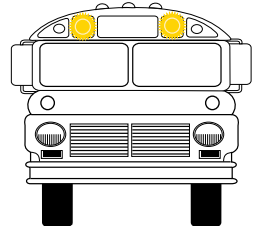
- Overhead red lights are flashing and bus is stopped. Stop no closer than 20 feet from the bus.

- Proceed when red lights are turned off and it is safe to do so.

With Alternately Flashing Overhead Red and Yellow Lights



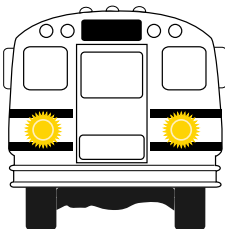
- Overhead yellow lights are flashing—prepare to stop.



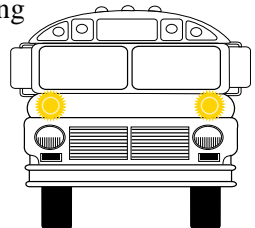
- Overhead red lights are flashing. Stop no closer than 20 feet from the bus

- Proceed when red lights are turned off and it is safe to do so.

All School Buses



- Yellow hazard warning lights are flashing on moving or stopped bus—proceed with caution.



It is not necessary to stop for a school bus that has stopped on the other side of a divided highway where the road is separated by a barrier, such as a concrete or grass median, island, or other structures that separate the flow of traffic. Use extra care around buses and in school zones. Children are small and hard to see and may dart into the street or out from around parked vehicles.

*AAA Michigan, 1994

Aggressive Driving and Road Rage

Watch for aggressive drivers. Aggressive drivers run stop signs and red lights, speed, tailgate, weave their vehicles in and out of traffic, pass on the right, and may make improper hand gestures. They sometimes yell at you, honk their horns, or flash their headlights. You must watch for these drivers because their actions place them and other motorists at an increased risk for traffic accidents. We have all seen aggressive drivers. They disregard their own safety as well as that of others. Do not be an aggressive driver. Be courteous and aware of the traffic around you. Take a moment to think about the driving behaviors that bother you. If you drive in the same manner, your behavior probably annoys other drivers. Avoid the following behaviors:

- Merging improperly. Failing to merge smoothly disrupts the flow of traffic. Always try to merge smoothly when entering the expressway or turning from one road to another. If you see a driver making an ill-advised merge or turn, slow down and give him or her room. Getting angry will not help and your anger could adversely affect your judgment, resulting in a traffic crash. A driver may be wrong, but how important is it to prove you are right? Do not risk injury or death because you feel you have been wronged when driving. It is much wiser to back off and allow the driver to merge.
- Driving slowly in the left lane. Use all lanes properly and obey the speed limit. If you are using the left-hand lane to pass slower traffic and someone tailgates you, move back into the right-hand lane when it is safe to do so and allow the faster traffic to move ahead. Driving in the left-hand lane and allowing traffic to build up behind you

increases the chances aggressive drivers may take careless risks attempting to get around you.

- **Tailgating.** This is another aggressive-driver trait. If another driver tailgates you, pull over and let him or her pass. It is much better to have these unsafe drivers in front where you can see them rather than having them driving on your rear bumper.
- **Gestures.** Never gesture at other drivers when you become angry. If another driver is gesturing to you when you have made a driving error, let him or her know you are sorry. Everyone makes mistakes. Returning gestures or becoming angry will not correct your mistake. It will only serve to make both of you angrier and increase the risk of confrontation or a traffic crash. Don't let yourself become a victim of road rage.

Always remember that safe driving is affected by your driving attitude and your ability to control your stress and anger.