A painted curb means that you must follow special rules to park there. Check with the locality for specific meanings. Generally, the colors on the curb mean:

White — Stop only long enough to pick up or drop off passengers.

Yellow — Stop only long enough to load or unload. Stay with your car.

Red — Do not stop, stand or park.

In this section you'll learn about:

- Hand position
- Speed limits
- Stopping
- Yielding the right-of-way
- Roundabouts
- Changing lanes
- Over-correcting
- Turning
- U-turns
- Turn signals
- Maintaining a space cushion
- Searching
- Blind spots
- Sharing the road
- Backing
- Parking
- Visibility
- Lights
- Hazardous conditions
- Dangerous driving behaviors
- Traffic crashes
- Deer hazards
- Traffic stops

Section 3: Safe Driving

Every time you get behind the wheel, you accept responsibility for your actions. You must obey Virginia's traffic laws, and ensure the safety of you, your passengers, and other motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists on the roadways.

Hand Position

Sit straight but relaxed and place your hands on the steering wheel. If your steering wheel were a clock, your hands should be at the 8 o'clock and 4 o'clock positions. Hold the wheel with your fingers and thumbs. Avoid gripping it with your palms.

Speed Limits

A speed limit is the maximum legal speed you can travel on a road under ideal conditions. You may drive slower than the speed limit, as long as you don't impede the normal movement of traffic, but it is illegal to drive any faster. By law you must drive slower where signs indicate a school zone speed limit or work zone speed limit is in effect, and/or if conditions such as road construction or bad weather make the posted speed unsafe. According to Virginia law, if you are driving 20 or more miles per hour (MPH) above the speed limit, or over 85 MPH, a law enforcement officer may charge you with reckless driving, regardless of the speed limit. It is considered a misdemeanor criminal offense if convicted of reckless driving. The court may require a fine, suspend your driving privilege and/or impose a jail sentence. If the violation results in death and the operator's license was suspended or revoked at the time of the offense, it may be considered a felony, which carries more serious consequences. You are subject to an additional $100 fine if convicted of driving between 81 and 85 MPH in a 65-MPH zone. It is illegal to use radar detectors in Virginia.

Unless there is a speed limit sign stating otherwise, the maximum speed limit for passenger vehicles and motorcycles is 25 MPH for school, business and residential areas; 35 MPH for unpaved roads and 55 MPH for all other roads.

Stopping

You must always stop your vehicle:

- at all stop signs, red traffic lights and flashing red signals
- when entering a street or crossing over a sidewalk from a driveway, alley, building or parking lot
- at railroad crossings with flashing signals
- when signaled by flaggers directing traffic
- for pedestrians attempting to cross the street at a crosswalk
- at the direction of a police officer. If you don't obey a law enforcement officer's signal to stop and the officer pursues you and is killed as a direct result of the pursuit, you will be guilty of a Class 4 felony.
- at the scene of a crash in which you are involved

When approaching a stop sign and the car in front of you proceeds, stop at the sign and proceed when the way is clear.

Stopping for School Buses

In the following pictures, the red vehicles must stop and remain stopped until all children are clear of the roadway and the bus moves again.

You must stop for stopped school buses with flashing red lights and an extended stop sign when you approach from any direction on a highway, private road or school driveway. Stop and remain stopped until all persons are clear and the bus moves again.

You must also stop if the bus is loading or unloading passengers and the signals are not on.

You do not have to stop if you are traveling in the opposite direction on a roadway with a median or barrier dividing the road and the bus is on the opposite side of the median or barrier. However, be prepared for unexpected actions by persons exiting the school bus.

Stopping Distance

Three factors determine the distance that it takes to stop your vehicle: perception time, reaction distance and braking distance.

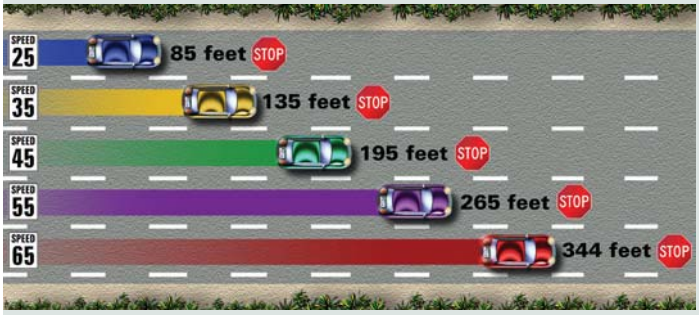
Perception time: The time it takes you to recognize a hazard.

Reaction distance: The distance your vehicle travels between the time you recognize a problem and the time you apply the brakes.

Braking distance: The distance your car travels after you apply the brakes.

Perception time, reaction distance and braking distance are affected by weather, visibility, and your mental and physical condition. Braking distance is also affected by how fast your vehicle is traveling, the condition of your brakes and tires, and the pavement condition. For example, wet pavement can double your braking distance.

Average stopping distance on dry, level pavement.



Source: Code of Virginia Section 46.2-880

Antilock Brakes

If your vehicle has antilock brakes, be sure that you understand how they work. Check your vehicle owner's manual and practice braking before you go out on the road. Remember, never pump antilock brakes.

Yielding the Right-of-Way

Yield also means to stop if you cannot merge safely into the flow of traffic.

Examples of yielding the right-of-way:

- When vehicles from different directions arrive at an intersection at different times, the vehicle that arrives first goes first.
- When vehicles from different directions arrive at the same time at an intersection with no signs or signals, the driver on the left must allow the driver on the right to go first.
- If the traffic lights at an intersection are not working, all vehicles coming to the intersection must stop. The driver on the left must yield to the driver on the right.
- Drivers entering an interstate from an entrance ramp must yield the right-of-way to traffic already on the highway.
- Drivers entering any intersection or roundabout must yield to traffic already in it.
- When entering a roadway from a private road or driveway, you must stop and yield to all traffic and pedestrians.
- You must yield to pedestrians or bicyclists who are crossing a street within a clearly marked crosswalk or at an unmarked intersection. Remember that turns on red are especially hazardous to pedestrians. Avoid conflict with pedestrians and bicyclists; permit them to cross the street safely.
- You must yield to funeral processions. Do not cut through, join or interfere with a funeral procession. Unless led by a police escort, the lead vehicle in a funeral procession must obey all traffic signs and signals. Other drivers in the procession may follow carefully without stopping and may use hazard lights (flashers) to indicate they are in the procession.
- You must yield to all military convoys. Never cut through or join a military convoy.

Yielding to Vehicles with Flashing Lights

Drivers must take specific actions when they see vehicles with flashing or blinking blue, red, amber (yellow) or white lights on roadways.

Stationary (Stopped) vehicles

- When approaching a stationary emergency vehicle or tow truck with flashing lights on a highway, proceed with caution and, if reasonable, with due regard for safety and traffic conditions, change to a lane not next to the vehicle. If you are unable to safely change lanes, reduce your speed and proceed with caution. Violations can result in court suspension of your driver's license and demerit points on your driving record.
- When passing stationary vehicles in the process of trash collection on a highway of at least four lanes, change to a lane not next to the vehicle, if you can change lanes safely. If on a highway of fewer than four lanes or if you are unable to change lanes, slow down to 10 miles per hour below the posted speed limit and pass at least two feet to the left of the vehicle.
- When passing a stationary mail vehicle, proceed with caution and maintain a safe speed for highway conditions.
- You may not park within 500 feet of where fire trucks or equipment are stopped answering an alarm.

Approaching vehicles – same direction

- Never follow an emergency vehicle closer than 500 feet when its lights are flashing.
- When police, fire and rescue vehicles or ambulances approach you from behind your vehicle using a siren, flashing lights or both, you must immediately yield the right-of-way. Safely pull over to the right edge of the road and stop until the emergency vehicle has passed.

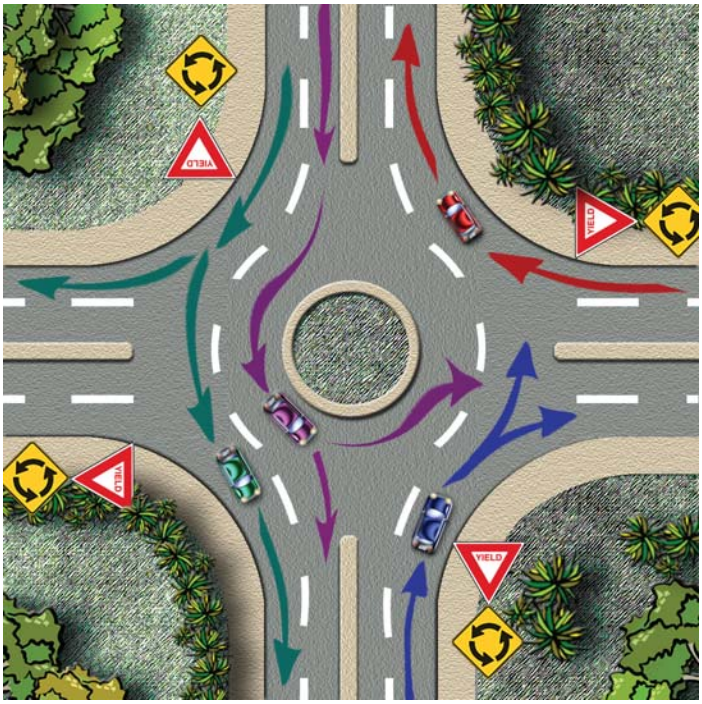
Approaching vehicles – opposite direction

- When emergency vehicles approach you in the opposite lane on an undivided highway, you must pull over to the edge of the road and stop until the emergency vehicle passes.

These requirements do not apply in highway work zones.

Roundabouts

Roundabouts are circular intersections with an island in the center and have one or more lanes. Entering traffic must yield the right-of-way to pedestrians, and to traffic already in the circle. Each road approaching the roundabout is marked with a yield sign and may also have yield line markings on the pavement. Drivers must pay attention and obey the signs. After entering the roundabout, drivers must travel in a counter-clockwise direction.



When approaching a roundabout, slow down. Use your turn signals to indicate where you want to go. If you plan to turn right, stay to the right as you enter the roundabout. If you plan to go straight, you may stay in either lane (if it is a dual lane circular intersection). If you plan to turn left, stay to the left as you enter the roundabout.

More information about driving safely through a roundabout is available at the Virginia Department of Transportation web site at http://www.virginiadot.org/info/faq-roundabouts.asp.

Tips for driving safely through a roundabout:

- As you approach the roundabout, slow down; look for the street and direction signs. This will help you know which exit to take. These signs should be posted along the roadside before you reach the roundabout.
- When you arrive at the roundabout, yield the right-of-way to pedestrians and bicyclists. You also must yield to any vehicles already in the roundabout. Sometimes your entry point will be controlled by a stop or yield sign, or traffic signal. When the way is clear, you may enter the roundabout.
- While inside the roundabout, stay in your lane until you are ready to exit. Use your vehicle's right turn signal to let drivers around you know what you want to do.
- Do not change lanes or take an exit before checking for vehicles that may be continuing through the roundabout in the lane next to you or behind you. Expect vehicles to be in blind spots you cannot see in your rearview or side mirrors. Quickly glance over your shoulder and check for any vehicles that may be in your blind spot.

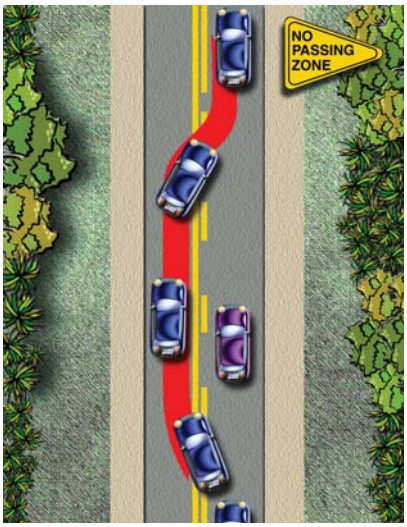
Changing Lanes

Before changing lanes, check your side and rearview mirrors for traffic approaching you from behind. Then, use your turn signal to let other drivers know you plan to change lanes. Check for other drivers who also may be moving into the same lane. Just before you begin moving into the other lane, quickly glance over your shoulder and check for any vehicles that may be in your blind spot.

Whether you are changing lanes, passing, entering or exiting a highway, always use your turn signals and check traffic to the rear and sides. When driving on a multi-lane highway, stay in the right lane if you are driving slower than the traffic around you. The left lane is for passing only.

Passing

When passing another vehicle:



- check the traffic ahead of you, behind you and in your blind spot before you attempt to pass. Signal and then accelerate to pass. Return to the right lane as soon as you can see the front of the passed vehicle in your rearview mirror.
- it is against the law to exceed the speed limit as you pass.
- complete the pass before you reach a No Passing zone. If you're still in the left lane when you reach the zone, you're breaking the law.
- you may pass on the right if the vehicle you are passing has signaled and is making a left turn. Be cautious because the vehicle you are passing may be blocking your view or blocking the view of other drivers. You may not pass on the right if you must drive off the pavement or main portion of the roadway to get around the other vehicle.

- when approaching or passing a person riding a bicycle, moped, or power-assisted bicycle or other device, reduce speed and pass at least three feet to the left.

When being passed, don't speed up. Maintain a steady speed or slow down.

Passing is unlawful and unsafe:

- on hills, curves, at intersections or railroad crossings, except on roads with two or more lanes of traffic moving in the same direction
- off the pavement or on the shoulder of the road
- when a school bus is stopped to load or unload passengers on a public road (unless a physical barrier or unpaved median separates traffic going in either direction) or on a private road
- when a solid line marks the left side of your lane
- when approaching a crosswalk and the vehicle ahead of you or the lane next to you is stopped

Over-correcting

Over-correcting occurs when the driver turns the steering wheel more sharply than expected, causing the rear wheels of the vehicle to slide toward the outside of the turn. This may result in the loss of vehicle control.

Most over-correction crashes are single vehicle crashes and are often preventable. A driver should remain alert at all times. Reduce speed and use extra caution while driving on curved roads. If you veer off the road, curved or straight, do not panic. Gradually reduce your speed, look in the direction you want to go, slowly steer back onto the roadway.

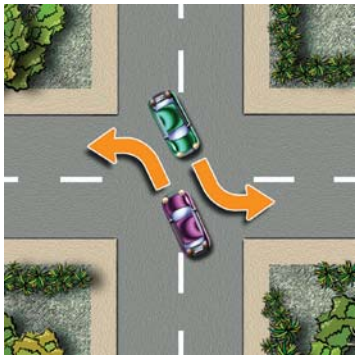
Turning

To make a right turn you should be in the lane furthest to the right. Signal your intent to turn by using the proper turn signal. You should signal at least three or four seconds, 100 feet, ahead of the turn. Look to your left and right to check the intersection for pedestrians and traffic. Then brake smoothly before and during the turn. If there is a red traffic light or a stop sign at the intersection, come to a complete stop before you make the turn. Turn into the lane closest to the curb unless pavement markings lead you otherwise, and then change lanes if needed.

To make a left turn you should be in the furthest left lane possible, turning into the leftmost lane on the intersecting road, unless pavement markings lead you otherwise; or, unless multiple left turn lanes are provided. If multiple left turn lanes are provided, you should choose the lane that will best serve your need once you enter the intersecting road. Signal your intent to turn by using the proper turn signal. You should signal at least three to four seconds, 100 feet, ahead of the turn. Look in all directions, checking the intersection for pedestrians and traffic coming from the opposite direction.

Keep your front wheels pointed straight ahead until you are actually going to make the left turn. This prevents you from being pushed into oncoming traffic if another vehicle crashes into you from behind. When the way is clear, make the left turn, yield to any vehicles (including bicycles and pedestrians) approaching from the opposite direction.

When two vehicles are approaching each other and signaling to turn left, both vehicles should turn in front of each other so that the passenger sides of the vehicles are beside each other.



U-Turns

U-turns are not legal everywhere. Before you make a U-turn, check for No U-Turn or No Left Turn signs. In business districts, cities and towns, U-turns are allowed only at intersections. Never make a U-turn on a highway.

When making a U-turn, turn on your left-turn signal, stop, and yield for approaching traffic. When the way is clear, proceed into the outside or right hand lane traveling in the opposite direction.

Turn Signals

When you plan to change lanes, turn, or enter or exit a highway, first give the proper turn signal. Using your turn signal, which is required by law, communicates your intended movement to drivers around you. Develop a good habit and use turn signals or hand signals even if no other traffic is on the road.

Hand Signals

Left Turn	Right Turn	Slow or Stop
Left hand and arm pointing straight out	Left hand and arm pointing upward	Left hand and arm pointing downward

When you plan to turn, signal three or four seconds, 100 feet, ahead of your turn. Be aware that drivers planning to turn into your lane may not know exactly where you will turn; drivers may pull out in front of you. Be alert.

After you complete the turn or lane change, be sure the turn signal stops flashing.

Maintaining a Space Cushion

Space around your vehicle gives you distance to react in emergencies and avoid a crash. Create a space cushion around your vehicle by staying in the middle of your lane. Make sure there is enough room ahead of your vehicle and behind it for other vehicles to pass or stop safely.

Use the two-, three- and four-second rule to determine if you are following far enough behind the vehicle ahead of you.

Following Distance	
At these posted speeds and on dry surfaces, this distance, in seconds, allows the driver to steer and brake out of a problem areas.	
2 seconds	Under 35 MPH
3 seconds	35-45 MPH
4 seconds	46-70 MPH

Here's how the following distance rule works.

- Glance at the vehicle ahead as it passes a fixed object, such as an overpass, sign, fence, corner or other fixed mark.
- Begin counting the seconds it takes you to reach the same place in the road.
- If you reach the mark before you have counted off two, three, or four seconds, depending on speed, you're following too closely. Slow down and increase your following distance.
- For bad weather conditions, heavy traffic, poor pavement or if your vehicle is in poor condition, add extra seconds to increase your following distance.

Drivers need to change following distance when speed or road conditions change. Hand response time is close to a half second. Foot response time is normally three-quarters of a second. This does not take into account any delay in perception time as a result of the driver being tired, on medication, distracted, etc. Road conditions, speed, driver alertness, and the weight of the vehicle you are driving all change the ability to stop.

Increase your following distance when driving:

- behind a large vehicle that blocks your vision
- in bad weather or heavy traffic
- when exiting an expressway
- behind a motorcycle or bicycle
- when being tailgated

Tailgating is when the driver behind you is following too closely. If you find yourself in this situation, do not brake suddenly. If possible, move over to another lane, or gently tap your brakes to flash your brake lights and slow down. This should encourage the tailgater to pass you or slow down.

Help the driver behind you by maintaining a safe following distance and a steady speed. Tap your brakes to warn the driver behind you when you plan to slow down or stop.

Searching

Searching means looking at the entire scene for anything that might come into your path. As you search the road, avoid staring at one thing. Keep your eyes moving and learn to read the road and your surroundings.

Looking ahead will help you identify risks early and provide you with more time to react. Expert drivers try to focus their eyes 20 to 30 seconds ahead. In the city, that equals approximately one block. Avoid staring at the middle of the road. Scan from side to side, checking for traffic signs and signals, cars or people that might be in the road by the time you reach them.

Search for clues on the road. Look for exhaust smoke, brake or back-up lights and turned wheels on vehicles. Clues like these warn that the vehicles may pull into your path. Watch for pedestrians, bicyclists and other slow moving vehicles that may be in the road ahead.

When driving in rural areas, watch for hidden intersections and driveways, curves, hills and different road conditions. Watch for other vehicles, especially trucks, oversized and slow-moving farm vehicles, and bicycles.

Check from left to right and then left again before entering an intersection. Whenever you reach a place in the road where other cars, people or animals may cross your path, look both ways to be sure it is clear. These include intersections, crosswalks, shopping centers, construction areas and playgrounds. At any intersection, look to the left first, since cars coming from the left will be closer to you. Then look to the right and take one more quick look to the left before you drive through.

Look behind. Use your rearview mirror to check the traffic behind you frequently, about every 10 seconds. This will alert you if someone is moving up too quickly or tailgating you. Check the traffic behind you when changing lanes, backing up, slowing down quickly or driving down a long, steep hill.

Blind Spots

Blind spots are danger areas where vehicles around you cannot be easily seen. Before driving, adjust your vehicle's mirrors. Make sure the inside rear view mirror frames the entire back window. Adjust both side mirrors so you can barely see the sides of your vehicle.

The best way to see a car in your blind spot is by quickly turning your head and glancing over your shoulder to ensure the way is clear before changing lanes or passing another vehicle.

Avoid driving in someone else's blind spot. This can be just as dangerous as not checking your own blind spot. Speed up or drop back; but, don't stay in the other driver's blind spot.

Sharing the Road

Drivers share the road with many other users: moped and motorcycle riders, trucks and buses, recreational vehicles and other vehicles of all shapes and sizes. Drivers also share the road with vulnerable road users including pedestrians and those on bicycles, wheel chairs, skateboards, roller skates, scooters, animals and animal-drawn vehicles. It is illegal to drive distracted and carelessly around vulnerable road users. It is your responsibility to adjust your driving to avoid others' mistakes and assure everyone's safety.

Pedestrians are especially prone to serious injury when struck.

- Be careful around schools, playgrounds and in residential areas where small children may be playing or crossing the street.
- Look out for the elderly, who may have poor vision and hearing. Remember that the elderly and people with disabilities may move slowly.
- Be especially aware of pedestrians when making a right or left turn. They have the right-of-way. Allow pedestrians to completely cross the street before beginning your turn.
- Passing at a crosswalk is illegal. You may not see pedestrians crossing the road in front of other vehicles.
- Be alert for pedestrians crossing the road. Stop and remain stopped until pedestrians have passed the lane in which your vehicle is stopped.
- Drivers are required to come to a full stop for a pedestrian using a cane or guide dog, as this indicates blindness or vision impairment.

Bicycles: Bicycles are considered vehicles and have the same right-of-way as motor vehicles. Bicyclists are allowed to ride in the center of the lane, when necessary, such as when they are about to turn left or when the lane is too narrow to share side-by-side with a car. Bicyclists are legally allowed on all public roads except interstates and most freeways (limited access highways). Bicyclists may also be riding in either direction on sidewalks.

Bicyclists are expected to obey the same traffic rules and regulations as vehicle drivers; however, some may not know or obey the rules. Slow down when you approach bicyclists. Using marked bicycle lanes is prohibited by motor vehicles, including while passing. State law requires motorists to pass cyclists with at least three feet of clearance. Give them plenty of room when passing and be prepared to stop suddenly. Check your blind spots. A bicycle's small size allows it to slip into your blind spot easily. Always check for bicyclists before you pull out, change lanes, turn, back up, open the door, or proceed through an intersection.

Mopeds: It is against the law to operate a moped faster than 35 MPH or on an interstate highway. Any person who operates a moped faster than 35 MPH is considered to be operating a motorcycle which must meet Virginia registration requirements. In addition, the operator would be required to hold a valid driver's license with a motorcycle classification or a driver's license restricted to operating motorcycles only.

Moped riders must be at least age 16 and obey all rules of the road. They must carry some form of government-issued photo identification (does not have to be a driver's license) that includes name, address and date of birth. As a driver, treat moped riders with the same care given to any other vehicle driver.

Riders and passengers must wear helmets, and use eye protection if the moped does not have a windshield. The moped must be titled and registered with DMV.

Although you do not need a driver's license to operate a moped, you may not operate a moped if you have been declared a habitual offender and your license is suspended or revoked for driving while intoxicated.

Motorcycles: Approximately half of all fatal motorcycle crashes involve automobiles. Many crashes are caused by the motorist's failure to see a motorcycle in traffic.

- Look for motorcyclists. In more than half of all crashes involving motorcycles and automobiles, the other driver didn't see the motorcycle until it was too late. Drivers are conditioned to look for four-wheeled vehicles; but they don't expect to see two-wheeled vehicles. A motorcycle's small size also makes it difficult to see.
- Check your blind spots. A motorcycle's small size allows it to slip into your blind spot easily. Always check for motorcycles before you pull out, change lanes, turn, back up or proceed through an intersection.

- Never tailgate a motorcycle (or any other vehicle). Allow yourself plenty of braking distance by adding an extra second to the following distance rule. In inclement weather, double this distance.
- Anticipate the motorcyclist's movements. Although a motorcycle is not as wide as the lane, the rider will use the entire lane as traffic situations and road conditions change. A slight change or debris on the road surface can be a major obstacle for a motorcyclist. Expect the motorcycle to make sudden moves within the lane. Never drive beside a motorcycle in the same lane.
- Yield to motorcycles. The small size of a motorcycle can cause you to misjudge the motorcycle's speed and distance. Before pulling out into traffic, check twice for motorcycles and use extra caution before you pull out in front of one.

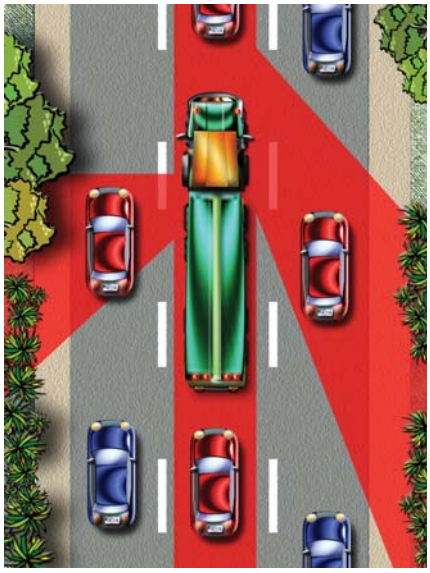
Light Rail: There is a light rail train system in Norfolk called The Tide. Light rail trains share the road with motor vehicles and bicyclists, and they intersect with motor vehicle traffic at 27 locations along the 7.4 mile route. Stay safe when driving around The Tide by obeying the tips below.

- Pay attention to changing traffic patterns and always follow the roadway.
- Never drive around lowered crossing gates.
- Always look both ways before turning across train tracks.
- Expect trains on any track at any time.
- Always obey signs and traffic signals.
- Never stop, pass or shift on train tracks.
- Don't cross train tracks unless you have enough room to cross without stopping and can clear the tracks to a safe distance.

For more info about light rail safety, visit www.gohrt.com or call (757) 222-6100.

Low Speed Vehicles: These electrically- or gas-powered four-wheel vehicles have a maximum speed ranging from 21 to 25 MPH. Low speed vehicles may be operated on public roads with speed limits of 35 MPH or less by licensed drivers or learner's permit holders accompanied by a licensed driver. Low speed vehicles must comply with all federal safety standards and must meet Virginia's requirements for passenger vehicle registration and insurance coverage. Golf carts are not classified as low speed vehicles.

Trucks, Tractor-Trailers, Buses and RVs: Trucks, tractor-trailers, buses and recreational vehicles (RVs) – including motor homes, campers and travel trailers – are longer, higher and wider than other vehicles. They accelerate slowly and require greater stopping and turning distances. Plus, there are danger areas around these vehicles where crashes are more likely to occur. These areas are called No-Zones. No-Zones on the side, front and rear also include blind spots where your car disappears from the driver's view. Learning the No-Zones can save your life.



- **Side No-Zones:** Trucks, tractor-trailers, buses and RVs have big No-Zones on both sides that are dangerous because these vehicles must make wide turns. These No-Zones or blind spots are much larger than your car's blind spots. If you can't see the driver's face in his side view mirror, then he can't see you.
- **Rear No-Zone:** Trucks, tractor-trailers, buses and RVs have huge No-Zones directly behind them. The driver can't see your car behind his vehicle and you can't see what's happening in traffic ahead of his vehicle. If the truck, bus or RV brakes or stops suddenly, you have no place to go and could crash into the vehicle's rear-end. Always maintain a safe following distance.
- **Front No-Zone:** You could get rear-ended by a truck, bus or RV if you cut in front too soon after passing the vehicle or if you cut in front and then suddenly slow down. The truck, bus and RV drivers would be forced to slam on their brakes. These vehicles need nearly twice the time and room to stop as cars. A truck and its trailer may be as long as 65 feet and it may take you more than half a mile of clear road to pass. When passing, look for the entire front of the truck in your rearview mirror before pulling in front. And then, maintain your speed.
- **Wide Turns:** Trucks, buses and RVs sometimes need to swing wide to the left or right to safely make a turn. They can't see the cars directly behind or beside them. In fact, their blind spots may stretch up to 20 feet in front of the cab and approximately 200 feet behind the vehicle. Never try to squeeze between a truck, bus or RV and the curb or another vehicle.

Light to Medium Trailers: These trailers are attached to mid-sized cars and trucks with safety chains and a trailer hitch. Large side mirrors are generally needed to increase visibility. Towing a trailer places additional stress on the vehicle; it takes the vehicle twice as long to pass, stop, accelerate and turn. Remember the No-Zones described under Trucks, Tractor-Trailers and RVs.

Before driving a vehicle with a light to medium trailer attached, perform a safety inspection before each trip. Ensure:

- the pin securing the ball mount to the receiver is intact
- the hitch coupler is secured
- safety chains are properly attached

- the electrical plug is properly installed
- brake lights, turn signals, and license plate lights are functioning properly.

Before pulling a trailer on public roads, find a location such as a vacant parking lot to practice and get the feel for how your vehicle and trailer will handle.

When driving a vehicle with a light to medium trailer attached:

- always allow for the added length of the trailer when you change lanes
- if your trailer starts to sway, slow down
- when backing up, place your hand on the bottom of the steering wheel. If you cannot see where you are backing up, have someone outside to help guide you. To back the trailer to the left, use your left hand to move the wheel left. To back the trailer to the right, use your right hand to move the wheel to the right.

Backing

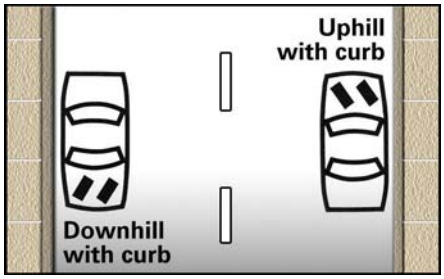
The most common mistake that drivers make when backing up is failing to look both ways behind them. Mirrors do not give you a full view. To see as much as possible, turn your body and head to the right and look out through the rear window. Back up slowly and check for pedestrians and approaching traffic by glancing quickly to either side.

Parking

When parking on a public road, move as far from traffic as possible. If you park on a shoulder, pull over as far on the shoulder as possible. If you park next to a curb, pull close to it. You may not park more than one foot from the curb. On a two-way street, park on the right side of the road. On a one-way road, park on either side.

Parking on a hill

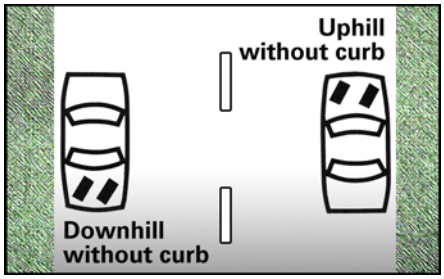
With a curb: Turn the front wheels of your vehicle to prevent it from rolling into the street.



Parking downhill — with curb Turn front wheels right

Parking uphill — with curb Turn front wheels left

Without a curb: Turn the front wheels so that if the vehicle rolls, the rear of the vehicle will roll away from traffic.



Parking downhill — no curb Turn front wheels right

Parking uphill — no curb Turn front wheels right

Be aware of other traffic when exiting your vehicle. Look for other cars, bicyclists, and pedestrians before opening the door.

You may not park:

- beside another parked vehicle (double parking)
- on crosswalks or sidewalks
- in front of driveways
- within areas where parking is prohibited by curbs painted yellow or No Parking signs
- in a parking space reserved for disabled persons
- in striped access aisles adjacent to a parking space reserved for disabled persons
- on the hard surface of a road when no curb is present
- within 15 feet of a fire hydrant
- within 20 feet of an intersection
- in a bike lane
- within 15 feet of the entrance to a fire, ambulance or rescue squad station
- within 500 feet of where fire trucks or equipment are stopped answering an alarm
- within 50 feet of a railroad crossing
- in such a way that you block or create a hazard for other vehicles in a designated traffic lane

Visibility

Most of what you do while driving depends on what you see. To be a good driver, you need to know what to look for, where to look, and how to adjust to possible problems. The single biggest contributor to crashes is failing to identify a risk. Always know where other vehicles are positioned around you. You must look down the road, to the sides, and behind your vehicle. You must also be alert for unexpected events, especially pedestrians and bicyclists. You must use your headlights at night and at other times when it's hard to see. You must be alert and pay attention to what is going on around you.

Lights

Virginia law requires motorists to use headlights during inclement weather such as rain, fog, snow or sleet when visibility is reduced to 500 feet. You must use your headlights whenever you use your windshield wipers as a result of bad weather. Using headlights at all times, including during the day, increases your vehicle's visibility.

Hazardous Conditions

Driving becomes hazardous when visibility is reduced or when the road surface is covered with rain, snow or ice. Reducing your speed should be your first response to decreased visibility and dangerous road conditions. Increase your space cushion by doubling your normal following distance (refer to the Maintaining a Space Cushion section for more information). Turn on your headlights.

Night Driving

At sunset, as soon as light begins to fade, turn on your headlights to make your vehicle more visible to others. You must use headlights from sunset to sunrise.

Use low-beams when driving in cities and towns, except on streets where there is no lighting. Switch to low-beams whenever you meet oncoming traffic to avoid blinding the other driver. When following, use low-beams whenever you are within 200 feet of the vehicle ahead.

Use high-beam headlights on highways, unless another vehicle is within 500 feet coming toward you. If the high-beams of an oncoming car are on, avoid looking directly at the bright lights. Glance toward the side of the road, then look quickly ahead to determine the other vehicle's position. Keep doing this until you have passed the other vehicle. Even if the other driver does not dim his headlights, do not turn on your high-beam headlights.

Fog

Fog reflects light and can reflect your own headlights back into your eyes. Use low-beam headlights in heavy fog and look for road edge markings to guide you. Even light fog reduces visibility and your ability to judge distances, so slow down.

Rain

Driving in heavy rain can be as hazardous as driving in fog, especially if the wind is blowing. Other vehicles to the rear and in blind spot areas are especially difficult to see when it's raining.

Use your low-beam headlights to see and be seen. In light rain or drizzle, turn on your windshield wipers to improve visibility; using wipers for sprinkles may smear the windshield and make it harder to see, so make sure you have windshield washer fluid.

When rain begins, during the first half-hour, roads are more likely to be slippery due to oil on the road surface mixing with water. Use caution when driving through ponded water, and avoid it if possible. Ponded water can cause vehicles to hydroplane or otherwise lose control.

Snow

Remove snow and ice from your entire car, including the roof, hood and rear of the vehicle, before you start driving. Snow and ice left on the car can fly off when the vehicle is moving and create a hazard for other motorists. Be sure to clear all of your windows, mirrors and front and rear lights of snow or ice so you can see and communicate with other drivers.

Equip your car with all-weather snow tires or chains to help prevent skidding and reduce stopping distance.

Driving on packed snow is similar to driving on ice. When you brake, apply the brakes gently. Slow down before stopping or turning.

When driving on slippery surfaces and you need to stop, release the accelerator and apply brakes gently. You have the most traction and control when the front tires are rolling. Keeping a slow, steady speed – rather than hard braking – will allow you to control your vehicle.

Watch for ice on bridges and in shady areas. Bridges freeze before other road surfaces.

Dangerous Driving Behaviors

Aggressive Driving

This dangerous driving behavior is defined by Virginia law as the intent to harass, intimidate, injure or obstruct another person while committing one or more traffic offenses such as failing to stop or yield the right-of-way, avoiding a traffic control device or failing to give way to an overtaking vehicle.

When aggressive drivers are behind the wheel, these high-risk drivers take out their anger on other motorists. Their frustration levels run high while their concerns for fellow motorists run low. They break the law by running stop signs and red lights, speeding, tailgating, weaving in and out of traffic, passing on the right (including on the shoulder and unpaved portions of the road), making improper and unsafe lane changes, as well as making hand and facial gestures, screaming, honking and flashing their lights.

Protect yourself. If you see an aggressive driver, stay out of the way. Don't challenge the aggressive driver by speeding up or trying to out-maneuver him. Avoid eye contact and ignore his gestures and shouting.

Remember, if you are convicted of aggressive driving, your license could be suspended for ten days or for as long as six months.

Distracted Driving

Driving requires your full attention. There are many distractions that may prevent drivers from focusing on driving: changing the radio or CD, talking to passengers, observing outside surroundings, eating, using a cell phone and more. When on the road, drivers should not use cell phones, computers or other distracting devices except to report a crash or emergency. Before engaging in distracting behavior, pull over and stop the vehicle in a safe location.

Virginia law prohibits drivers under age 18 from using cell phones or any other wireless communication device while driving except in a driver emergency or the vehicle is lawfully parked or stopped. Text messaging or reading of text messages while driving is illegal for all drivers. A ban of all hand-held devices is in effect in certain counties and cities in Virginia, and drivers are responsible for following these local ordinances.

Annually, driver distraction accounts for roughly 20 percent of all traffic crashes in Virginia. Why is distracted driving so deadly? Because while the driver is distracted, the vehicle may move into a high risk situation. The driver then loses precious seconds before recognizing the situation and must make an emergency maneuver. Young distracted drivers are even more susceptible. Failure to maintain proper control, following too closely, and not yielding the right-of-way are common actions of young distracted drivers. Inexperience in handling or controlling a vehicle during an emergency situation combined with distracted driving (cell phone use, other passengers, eyes not on the road, etc.) puts them at greater risk of a crash.

Don't let this happen to you. Take the following precautions.

- Concentrate. Keep your eyes on the road and your hands on the wheel at all times. Also, keep your body alert; sit straight, but relaxed. Look in the direction that you want to go.
- Set or adjust the controls on the vehicle and other devices as soon as you get in the car and before you begin driving.
- Do not use a cell phone.
- Anticipate the traffic and environment around you by searching ahead and checking your rearview mirrors often.
- Maintain a space cushion around your vehicle. Make sure there is enough room ahead of your vehicle and behind it.

Drowsy Driving

Constant yawning, head nodding, heavy eyelids, difficulty remembering the last few miles driven, missing road signs or exits, unplanned lane changes, driving off the road or hitting rumble strips are all signs of drowsy driving. Driving while you are sleepy increases your crash risk as you struggle to process complex information coming from different places at once. You may make careless driving decisions, have trouble paying attention or actually fall asleep while driving.

To avoid drowsy driving:

- Get plenty of quality sleep before a trip.
- Avoid alcoholic beverages and heavy foods.
- Beware of medications that can impair your driving ability.
- Limit long distance driving. Stop at least every two hours for rest.
- Stop at a safe place and take a nap. As little as 10 to 20 minutes of sleep can make a big difference.
- If possible, drive with a companion and switch drivers when necessary. Always let a well-rested person drive.
- Avoid driving from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m.

Rolling down a window, chewing gum, turning up the radio, or consuming caffeine, energy drinks or other stimulants do not prevent drowsy driving and are not reliable methods for staying awake. Drowsy driving is a type of impaired driving and puts the driver and everyone else on the roadway at risk for harm. If you observe a drowsy driver, find a safe place to stop or ask a passenger to call law enforcement. Be able to describe the location, vehicle and actions you observed.

Drinking and Driving

Legally, drivers age 21 or older are considered to be **driving under the influence (DUI)** if your blood alcohol content (BAC) is .08 percent or higher. If your driving is impaired, you can be convicted of driving under the influence with a BAC lower than .08 percent. If under age 21, you can be convicted of illegal consumption of alcohol if your BAC is at least .02 but less than .08. If your BAC is .08 or higher you could be convicted of a DUI. If your driving is impaired because you are under the influence of any drug, you may face the same penalties as driving under the influence of alcohol.

Researchers estimate that **between the hours of 10 PM and 2 AM three out of every ten drivers are drunk.** More than one-third of these drivers have been drinking at someone else's home. Nearly 50 percent of the drivers arrested for DUI are social to moderate drinkers. Don't think that it won't happen to you. In your lifetime, there's a 50-50 chance that you'll be involved in an alcohol-related crash.

Just one alcoholic drink can affect your driving ability because even a small amount of alcohol affects the brain's functions – particularly vision, judgment, and coordination.

Because alcohol affects your judgment and driving ability, your chances of being in a crash are seven times greater if you drive after drinking than if you drive sober.

Twelve ounces of beer is the same as a shot of liquor or a five-ounce glass of wine.

Only time can decrease intoxication. Coffee, cold showers or exercise will not sober you up.

Alcohol-related crashes are not accidents. They can be prevented! The only way to avoid the risks of drinking and driving is to decide before you start drinking that you are not going to drive. Remember, alcohol affects judgment. Making the decision not to drive is a lot more difficult after one or two drinks.

Drive to social events in groups of two or more and have the driver agree not to drink.

Combining alcohol with other drugs usually multiplies the effects of both and can have a disastrous effect on your ability to drive. One drink taken when you are on another drug – even an aspirin, or allergy or cold medicine – could have the same effect on your driving ability as drinking several alcoholic beverages.

Almost any drug can reduce your ability to drive safely. It's not just illegal drugs that cause problems. Many over-the-counter medications and prescription drugs for headaches, hay fever, colds, allergies or nervous conditions can cause drowsiness and dizziness. This includes syrups, drops, sprays, pills and tablets. They often affect driver alertness and slow reaction time.

Read the label before taking any drug or medicine. Look for warnings about side effects. If you're uncertain about the effects of a drug, ask your pharmacist or doctor for advice. Remember that, while the effects may vary among users, no drug is harmless.

Traffic Crashes

If you are involved in a traffic crash, you must:

- **stop** at the scene of the crash or as close to the scene as possible without blocking traffic. Drivers must move vehicles from the road immediately if the vehicles are able to be moved, no one is injured and the driver is capable of safely doing so.
- **give any help** you can if someone is injured. Do not attempt to move an injured person from a wrecked vehicle unless you have the necessary medical training or there is an immediate danger such as fire.
- **report the crash** to the police as quickly as possible. Motor vehicle crashes involving property damage, personal injury or death must be reported to the police.
- **exchange information** with other people involved in the crash as soon as possible. Be sure to get the following information:
  - name, address and driver's license number of other drivers
  - license plate numbers of other vehicles
  - name and address of anyone who was injured
  - name and address of each witness
  - name, address and insurance policy number of other vehicle owners
- **notify** your insurance company immediately.

Law enforcement officers are required to forward a written crash report to DMV when a traffic crash results in injury or the death of any person or total property damage is in excess of $1,500. All crash information will be recorded on the DMV records of each driver involved in the crash.

You must make a reasonable effort to find the owner of an unattended vehicle or other property damaged in a crash. If you cannot locate anyone, leave a note that can be found easily at the scene of the crash. Include your name, telephone number, the date and time of the crash, and a description of the damage. You must also report the crash to the police within 24 hours.

Deer Hazards

Thousands of deer-vehicle crashes take place in Virginia each year, resulting in fatalities, injuries and costly vehicle damage. To avoid hitting a deer:

- Be alert at dusk and dawn especially in the fall.
- Slow down if you see a deer near or crossing the road. Deer frequently travel in groups; there are likely more deer nearby.
- Use the horn to scare deer away.
- If a collision with a deer or other animal is unavoidable, do not swerve. Brake firmly, stay in your lane, and come to a controlled stop.

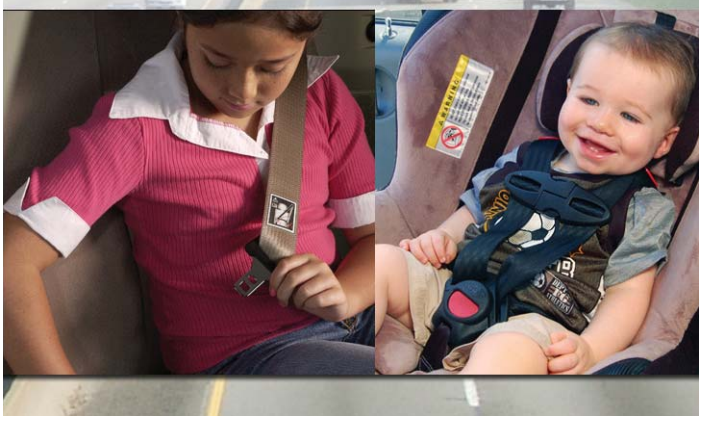
If you hit a deer, report it to law enforcement.

Traffic Stops

If you are stopped by a police officer:

- Remain calm.
- Pull your vehicle to the side of the road in a safe location and park.
- Turn on your flashers.
- If you are pulled over at night, turn on your vehicle's interior lights.
- Turn off your engine, radio, and any other device that could block communication with the officer.
- Roll down your window so that you can communicate with the officer. An officer may approach your vehicle on the driver or passenger side for safety reasons.
- Keep your safety belt fastened and ask your passengers to keep their belts fastened.
- Stay in your vehicle. Do not get out unless the officer asks you to.
- Keep your hands in plain view, preferably on the steering wheel. Ask your passengers to keep their hands in plain view also.
- Do not make any movement that will make the officer think you are hiding or reaching for something.
- Carry proper identification: a valid driver's license, proof of vehicle registration and proof of insurance. If the officer asks for these documents, tell him where they are and reach for them slowly, keeping one hand on the steering wheel.
- If the officer is driving an unmarked car or is not in uniform, you may ask to see his or her identification.
- Answer the officer's questions fully and clearly. If you disagree with the officer, do not discuss your point of view at that time. You will have your chance to make your case in court.
- You will be asked to sign the citation. Sign the citation; this is not an admission of guilt. Refusal to sign the citation may result in your arrest. Or, you may be required to go to the police station.

Section 4: Seat Belts, Air Bags and Child Safety Seats



In this section you'll learn about:

- **Seat belts**
- **Air bags**
- **Child safety seats**

Wearing seat belts, also called safety belts, can double your chances of surviving a crash and more than double your chances of avoiding serious injury.

Seat Belts

Under Virginia law, the driver and all front seat passengers must wear safety belts. A driver transporting anyone younger than age 18 must ensure that the passenger is properly secured in a safety belt, booster seat or child safety seat no matter where the child is seated in the vehicle.

Remember to wear your lap belt low on your lap and against your thighs. Wear your shoulder belt over your shoulder and across your chest. Never wear your shoulder belt behind your back or under your arm. Your shoulder and lap belts should be snug. Pregnant women are much safer if buckled up by wearing the belt as low on the pelvis as possible.

Exception: A waiver of the seat belt requirement may be granted by a licensed physician if the use of a safety belt is not reasonable due to the driver's or passenger's physical or medical condition. The person granted the waiver must carry the physician's signed written statement identifying the person with the waiver and the reason for the waiver.