

# SAFE and WARM

## Balancing Cool Winter Temperatures with Car Seat Safety



### A Child's Coat May Be Too Big to Wear in a Car Seat

The following steps can be used to determine if a child's coat is too bulky and not safe to wear under the car seat harness.

1. Put the coat on the child. Place the child in the car seat and secure with a snug harness. A snug harness does not allow the webbing to be folded between your thumb and forefinger when pinched at the shoulder.
2. **Without loosening the harness**, unbuckle the harness and remove the child from the car seat.
3. Remove the coat and secure the child back in the car seat. Buckle the harness straps, but do not tighten the harness. The harness tightness remains adjusted to the same tightness as when the child was wearing the coat.
4. Pinch the webbing between your thumb and forefinger. The coat is too bulky if the webbing can be folded between your thumb and forefinger.



### Safe car seat tips for infants in cold weather:

- ◆ Store the car seat carrier in the house when not in use.
- ◆ Dress the infant as if they were going to be indoors. A thin sweater or jacket can be worn by the child.
- ◆ Warm the vehicle, when possible, before taking the infant outside.
- ◆ Secure the child in the carrier of the rear-facing only car seat making sure the harness straps are snug (no webbing can be pinched between the thumb and forefinger). Make sure the harness retainer clip is at armpit level.
- ◆ Place a blanket over the harnessed infant in the car seat and then carry the infant to the vehicle.
- ◆ Use only car seat manufacturer approved aftermarket covers (fitted blankets) designed to provide warmth. Approved covers have been tested with the car seat and will not compromise the child's safety.
- ◆ Remove blanket, if needed, during travel as the car warms up. Use the blanket for warmth when the child is removed from the vehicle.



### Cold weather car seat safety tips for toddlers and preschoolers:



- ◆ Wear the coat and hat when walking to the vehicle.
- ◆ Remove the coat in the car and secure the child in the car seat. Buckle and tighten the harness to fit snugly on the child.
- ◆ Turn the coat around and put it on backward. Slip the child's arms through the sleeves. The back of the coat will cover the child to keep them warm during travel.
- ◆ Purchase winter coats that provide warmth without bulk and allows the car seat harness to fit the child correctly.

### Bulky Coats are NOT Recommended for Children in Car Seats

As cold winter weather settles into Pennsylvania, it is important to keep children warm with safety in mind.

**Bulky winter coats and car seats are a dangerous combination.**

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration recommends that:

- ◆ Children do not wear bulky coats in their car seats.
- ◆ Coats should be removed before children are buckled up for every ride, every time.

**Why?** Winter coats are bulky; even when children appear to be snugly fitted in their car seats, the coats can introduce slack in the harness.

As a general rule:

- ◆ Dress children in a sweatshirt or light jacket under the harness straps of a car seat.
- ◆ Dress in light layers to keep children safe without adding bulk or puffy material between the harness of the car seat and the child's body.

**During a crash, a bulky winter coat or a non-regulated infant swaddling product will compress making the harness straps loose on the child.**

A loose harness allows the child to have additional forward movement in a crash which is associated with greater injury risks. In a worst-case scenario, a loose harness could allow the child to slip through the straps and come out of the car seat.

# WINTER DRIVING TIPS FOR FAMILIES



The safest winter driving practice you can follow is staying off the roads when the winter weather is particularly severe, or road conditions are especially bad. Unless it is an emergency, you are better off avoiding the roads than chancing an accident, or worse, by venturing out unnecessarily. If you must go out driving in the snow, check the local weather frequently via radio and the internet to stay up to date on changing conditions. If possible, wait until road crews have had the opportunity to treat the roadways before going out.

- ◆ **Establish a Winter Driving Plan:** Make your travel plans known, when you plan to leave and arrive, any stops you'll be making along the way, and the route you will be taking. If you are unable to reach your destination or get help, someone will know how to find you.
- ◆ **Prepare Your Vehicle:** Maintain your vehicle year-round, however it is important to winterize your vehicle to avoid the dangers of winter weather.
- ◆ **Turn on Your Headlights - To See and Be Seen:** Help others to see you on the road. Turn on your headlights even if it is not snowing or sleeting. Brush the snow off your headlights and tail lights.
- ◆ **Clear Snow and Ice off Your Vehicle:** Failure to remove the snow or ice creates the potential of causing a crash if it falls off and hits a motorist or pedestrian.

## Does Pennsylvania law require removal of all snow and ice from vehicles on the roadway?

**Yes.** It is illegal to drive with snow and ice obstructing your vision through the front, side, or rear windows.

(Title 75, Section 4524)

Additionally, if snow or ice dislodges or falls from a moving vehicle and strikes another driver or pedestrian causing serious bodily injury or death, the driver faces a fine of no less than \$200 and as high as \$1,000.

(Title 75, Section 3720)

- ◆ **Reduce Your Speed:** Driving slowly helps you maneuver the car better and stay in control. Speed limits are intended for dry weather; it will take much longer to stop a car on a slick surface. Exercise extreme caution on bridges and interstate/freeway entrances and exits, as these are often the first areas of the road to freeze.

- ◆ **Equip Your Car with Chains or Snow Tires:** Snow tires or tire chains help give traction when driving on snow or ice. Winter tires are made to enhance braking in snow and ice with their aggressive tread and specialized tread compounds.
- ◆ **Do Not Use Cruise Control:** Full control of your car is key to driving safely on hazardous winter roads. The automatic features of cruise control could accelerate the car when the tires have lost traction, resulting in a loss of control of the vehicle.
- ◆ **Increase Your Following Distance:** When driving in snow and ice, it is best to increase the following distance based on conditions. Increased following distance reduces the need to brake abruptly causing the car to lose traction and skid.
- ◆ **Do Not Brake When Skidding:** Avoid sudden braking and acceleration. Slow acceleration and slow, controlled braking can help you avoid skidding on icy surfaces. If your car starts to skid, DO NOT slam on the brakes! Simply take your foot off the gas and point the steering wheel in the direction you want to go. Your tires should regain traction as you slow down.

- ◆ **Prepare a Winter Emergency Travel Kit:** Select items that can be used to dig you out of a snow bank or to help stay warm while assistance is on its way.

A winter emergency kit will include:

- ◆ Ice scraper
- ◆ First aid kit
- ◆ Flares/Jumper Cables
- ◆ Cell phone and charger
- ◆ Bottled Water
- ◆ Non-perishable food
- ◆ Matches and candles
- ◆ Blanket
- ◆ Safety absorbent, sand or cat litter
- ◆ Extra warm clothing and gloves
- ◆ Small / Foldable shovel
- ◆ Flashlight and extra batteries
- ◆ Other items, as necessary (medication, baby supplies, pet food, etc.)



- ◆ **Keep Your Distance from Snow Plows:** Snowplows serve to make roads passable during the worst winter weather.
  - ◆ Avoid passing snow plows or other similar vehicles while they are working. Road conditions in front of a snow plow are typically much worse. If you must pass, since snow plows push snow to the right, only pass on the left side. During plowing operations, visibility can be reduced by blowing snow and plow operators may need time to stop or move over to avoid stranded vehicles.
  - ◆ Allow plenty of room by staying several car lengths away from the back of the plow; if you are caught in the cloud of snow dust, you are too close.
  - ◆ When you see an approaching snow plow on an undivided roadway, move as far away from the center line as you safely can since blowing snow may obscure the actual width of the snowplow's blade.



**Driving in the winter can be hazardous. Take extra precautions while driving to prevent crashes and keep yourself and your passengers safe!**

**Winter driving requires drivers to be careful and alert, but the most important tip for winter driving is to SLOW DOWN!**