

Driving in COVID-Normal Conditions

In 'COVID-normal' reopening and reactivation phases, drivers are advised to pay special attention to the following behaviours and situations on the road.

the issue

- The World Health Organization (WHO) has developed a set of guidelines to stay safe when leaving home and/or interacting with other people.¹
- When driving in COVID-normal conditions, even your own vehicle, additional disinfection measures are recommended.²
- In 2020 during lockdown and reopening periods, cities around the world have recorded an increase in speeding. Resulting in a higher ratio of fatal crashes to all collisions.³
- Some Australian states have had an increase of road fatalities during the reopening phases, especially pedestrians and cyclists.^{4,5}
- Due to the pandemic, the consumption of alcohol and other drugs has increased in Australia.⁶

Public health recommendations, such as working from home, have resulted in fewer vehicles on the streets, and more people adopting the bicycle as their main transport mode for short trips. As the number and purpose of trips has changed, so has the road network.⁷ The summer is approaching and authorities will implement an initiative promoting outdoors activities, closing some streets to motorized vehicles.⁸ For many 'new' cyclists interaction with other road users, as well as cycling routes and infrastructure, is something they are starting to explore and get familiar with.

Just as external conditions have changed, those inside vehicles also have. The nature of the coronavirus requires special measures to reduce the contagion risk inside vehicles. Additionally, due to the pandemic, mental illness reports of anxiety and depression have increased.⁹ Driving can be a stressful activity, and doing it safely requires a high level of concentration.¹⁰ Current circumstances could increase inattentive driving rates. These changes in the adoption of a COVID-normal mobility will require additional precautions from drivers.

inside the vehicle

1. Cleaning and Disinfecting

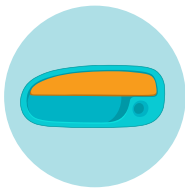
Recent studies have shown the coronavirus can spread in different ways, making closed settings high-risk environments. Vehicles represent a high contagion risk due to the reduced space between passengers, and commonly touched surfaces.¹¹

Health authorities have created a set of guidelines to minimize the risk of contagion and spread of the coronavirus.¹ Your vehicle, as any other closed space, should be cleaned and disinfected as often as possible, preferably in between journeys.²

Focus on the high-contact points, such as...



seatbelts



door handles
(internal and external)



dashboard¹²

Make sure the products used to clean the vehicle are at least 70% alcohol.¹³

2. Driver Distraction

Driving is a complex activity that demands paying full attention to the road conditions.¹⁰ Driving distractions can include mobile devices, changing radio stations and talking with passengers. These secondary activities, as well as getting caught in our thoughts (daydreaming), can make driving go to auto-pilot mode, increasing the risk of being involved in a crash.¹⁰

- In a driving setting, distraction is often described as a diversion of attention away from any activity that encourages safe driving, including texting or talking on a mobile phone, talking to passengers in the vehicle and looking at satellite navigation or even reaching for sunglasses.¹⁴
- Studies estimate that driver distraction or inattention accounts for approximately 1 in 4 vehicle crashes.¹⁵

With increasing cases of mental health issues due to COVID-19, being intentional and mindful when driving will be crucial to safely adapt to new conditions. Focus on the road. Plan your trip by identifying the route you will take before starting the journey. Double-check your thoughts while driving. Do not go into 'auto-pilot' mode.

**Have your vehicle COVID-ready:
clean, disinfect and pack your kit.**



Try not to travel with anyone outside your household or support bubble. While driving make sure all occupants are distributed to maximize space between them, and if recommended by local authorities or considered convenient, wear face covering. Try to open the vehicle windows to improve ventilation. Plan your journey, and keep a COVID-kit ready in your car with hand sanitizer, facemasks, eye protection, disposable gloves, disinfectant solution, and wipes.²

Avoid distractions by always putting your phone on "do not disturb" mode or out of reach when driving. Keep the kids occupied. If travelling long distances, bring activities they can complete in the back seat and let you concentrate on the road. Know you may find all types of driving behaviours on the road. Do not get emotional. Remember safety is the priority. All road users, you included, can make mistakes.

Avoid distractions, focus on the road.



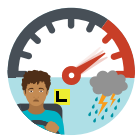
outside the vehicle

3. Speeding

Due to public health recommendations, during the lockdown and reopening phases there have been fewer motorized vehicles on the roads. Nevertheless, in Victoria there have been more excessive speed infringements issued.¹⁶



- Speeding increases the risk of losing vehicle control, making it more difficult to manoeuvre¹⁷



- Despite common belief, speeding is not just driving faster than the signed speed limit. It is also driving too fast for the road conditions, the condition of the vehicle or the experience of a driver.¹⁸



- Research shows that speeding 5km/h over the speed limit on urban roads or 10km/h over the speed limit on rural roads, can increase the risk of being involved in a road fatality by two-fold.¹⁷

Don't speed, drive to the conditions.



It is recommended to drive at or below the speed limit, always subject to the road, traffic and weather conditions. Driving at a responsible speed provides critical reaction time if needed, keeping everyone safe. Watch your speed, it is easy to speed if you are unaware of how fast you are travelling.

4. Approaching Intersections

Dynamics in communities are changing. More people are going for short walks around in their neighbourhoods.¹⁹ Exercising is taking place in the open public space. There are more pedestrians and cyclists out on the streets.

- Controlling speed at intersections is critical. Studies show that side impact or 't-bone' crashes are only survivable by passengers in a vehicle at much lower speeds than frontal crashes. This means that controlling speed at intersections is critical.¹⁷
- Intersection crashes account for approximately 20% of fatalities in Australia, the majority of deaths occurring at urban intersections.²⁰



Always be prepared to stop when approaching an intersection and traffic lights. Someone may enter the intersection abruptly. Always scan left and right, and never assume the other drivers are going to give you right of way.

Be prepared to stop.



Always scan right and left at intersections.



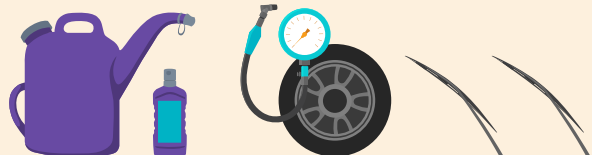
outside the vehicle

5. Vehicle Condition and Surroundings

Since the pandemic started and mobility restrictions were put in place, the general public has been driving less than usual. Before restarting regular activities, make sure your vehicle is in optimal state. Performing a general maintenance and checking oil level, tyres pressure and windscreen wipers condition, will improve your safety²¹. Also, always do a walk around your vehicle checking for obstructions before reversing.



**Check your vehicle,
check your surroundings.**



6. Weather Events and Driving Conditions



During extreme weather events listen to local news on the radio, or visit the official communication channels of local emergency agencies. Stay updated with the latest warnings and recommendations. If unsure call a help line. Studies have identified weather events can increase the risk of crashing.²² Water, snow, dust, fire and even sunlight, affect driving conditions.²³ Driving in wet weather or snow can reduce visibility, increasing the risk of losing control of the vehicle. Slow down.²⁴ When driving in wet weather or any adverse weather conditions, double the distance between you and the car in front.²⁵ If needed, drive in the centre of the road at the highest point, avoiding water over the road, one vehicle at a time.²⁶ Never drive through flood waters.

Fog and dust also reduce visibility and affect pavement conditions.²⁷ Slow down. Make sure you keep your lane. Turn your headlights on to alert other road users of your location. Strong winds affect vehicle stability, causing them to roll over in extreme cases. Slow down and be aware of the vehicles around you and possible falling objects, such as trees.²³

Always avoid bushfire areas. If caught in one, keep the windows and doors closed. Smoke and fire also affect visibility. Turn the headlights on.²⁸ Low sun during sunrise and sunset can cause glare making it difficult to identify other users of the road. Reflection on other vehicles, glass buildings or wet pavement, also affect visibility.²³ Slow down. Consider using sunglasses or a sun visor.²⁴

If adverse weather conditions are pending or current stay tuned to local radio stations for updates or alerts. Alternatively, stay in contact with your manager for updated company directions.

**During weather events, drive according to
the conditions. Slow down. Make yourself
visible. Avoid overtaking.**



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