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PRINTABLE SAFETY CHECKLIST

New driver car safety checklist

For teen drivers, student commuters and anyone in their first year with a car: the two-minute checks before every trip, what changes at night and in bad weather, which warning lights mean stop, what to do when something goes wrong, and what to keep in the car.

thefixcar.com editorial team · Reviewed by Jamie Kowalski, Service Advisor · October 2026

Free to print and share unchanged. Suitable for driver education, school and campus safety pages, and the glovebox.

1 Before every trip

Most new drivers spend months on manoeuvres and traffic rules and almost no time on the car itself. The checks below take under two minutes and are where most avoidable problems start.

Before starting the car

- ☐ **Seat belts on, everyone**, before the car leaves Park. Not "about to".
- ☐ **Phone on Do Not Disturb** before the key goes in. Silent mode still lights the screen.
- ☐ **Seat, headrest and all three mirrors** adjusted while stationary.
- ☐ **Navigation entered and running** before the car moves.
- ☐ **No warning light on**. Amber or red and you do not know what it means: open the manual first (see page 4).
- ☐ **Enough fuel or charge** for the trip, with a margin. Know roughly how far the car goes once the gauge reads low.
- ☐ **Nothing loose near the pedals**. A bottle that rolls under the brake pedal blocks it.

While driving

- ☐ **Phone stays out of reach**. If you picked it up for any reason, pull over before using it.
- ☐ **Following distance for the conditions**, more than feels necessary on motorways, in rain and behind large vehicles.
- ☐ **Speed for the road, not the sign**. The limit applies in good conditions; rain, fog, gravel and poor visibility all mean less.

Before leaving the driveway or parking space

- ☐ **Walk around the car**: flat or low tyres, anything behind the rear bumper, anything unusual on any side.
- ☐ **Headlights, brake lights and indicators work**. Have someone watch, or check brake lights in a window or garage-door reflection.
- ☐ **Tyre pressure light is off**. If it is on, check all four tyres with a gauge before driving.
- ☐ **Parking brake fully released**. A partly applied brake overheats and wears the rear brakes.

Essential · Better · Optional

Essential: belts on, phone on Do Not Disturb, mirrors set, no warning lights, fuel or charge adequate, navigation entered before moving.

Better: walk-around, exterior lights verified, pedal area clear, emergency contact saved in the phone.

Optional: weather check for longer trips, offline maps downloaded, a paper contact list in the glovebox.

2 Night, bad weather, longer trips

Before driving at night

- ☐ **Headlights and tail lights confirmed working** before sunset, not on the road.
- ☐ **Interior lights dimmed.** A bright cabin reduces how well you see the road.
- ☐ **High-beam switch located** in the driveway. The first time you discover you cannot turn high beams off should not be with oncoming traffic.
- ☐ **Plan the route** and expect to drive slower; distances and speeds are harder to judge in the dark.

Before bad weather

- ☐ **Wipers clear the glass fully.** Streaking or chattering means worn blades; replace them before heavy rain.
- ☐ **Front and rear demisters work,** and you know where both controls are.
- ☐ **Tyres have visible tread.** Wear bars flush with the tread surface: replace. Worn tyres lose wet grip fast.
- ☐ **Extra time built in.** Rain, fog and ice need lower speeds and longer stopping distances. Do not make up time in conditions that call for slowing down.
- ☐ **Washer fluid rated for the temperature** in winter; plain water freezes in the lines.

Before a longer trip

- ☐ **All four tyres inspected:** bulges, sidewall cracks, anything embedded in the tread.
- ☐ **Tyre pressures set cold** to the figure on the door placard, not the sidewall.
- ☐ **Spare tyre or inflator kit located** and the spare's pressure checked. Find it before you need it at night.
- ☐ **Offline maps downloaded.** Signal fails in rural areas.
- ☐ **Someone knows your route and expected arrival.** A short message before leaving is enough.
- ☐ **Oil and coolant levels checked** when the engine is cold.

Winter add-ons

Check tyre pressure when the temperature drops: pressure falls about 1 psi for every 10 °F (roughly 0.07 bar per 5 °C). Test a battery older than three years; parts stores do it free. Scrape every window, the mirrors and the roof: snow on the roof slides onto the windscreen under braking. Keep a scraper, a blanket, a torch, a phone charger and a warning triangle in the car from the first frost.

3 Warning lights: which ones mean stop

Every light comes on for a second when the ignition is switched on; that is a bulb check. A light that stays on is a message. Red means stop as soon as it is safe; amber means drive carefully and have it checked soon.

Oil pressure (oil can)

Stop the engine as soon as it is safe. Check the oil level. If the level is fine and the light stays on, do not restart: an engine without oil pressure is destroyed in under a minute.

Coolant temperature (thermometer)

Air conditioning off, heater on full, stop. Never open the cap while hot. A few minutes of overheating can warp the engine.

Brake (circle with "!")

Release the parking brake. If the light stays on, or the pedal feels soft or sinks, do not drive. With the ABS light at the same time: stop and call for recovery.

Battery (battery symbol)

The car is not charging. Switch off accessories and drive straight to a workshop, usually 15 to 30 minutes of power left. Power steering and brake assistance fade before the engine dies.

Check engine (engine outline)

Steady: tighten the fuel cap, have the code read this week. **Flashing:** slow down, reduce load, have it checked today; a flashing light means a misfire that damages the exhaust catalyst.

Tyre pressure (flat tyre with "!")

Check all four tyres with a gauge and inflate to the placard figure. Do not assume it will sort itself out; a badly underinflated tyre can fail at speed.

ABS / traction control

Flashing traction light on a wet road: the system is working, ease off. **Steady:** normal brakes still work but can lock under hard braking; brake earlier, have it checked.

Driver-assistance "unavailable"

The camera or radar cannot see (rain, snow, dirt, low sun). Clean the windscreen in front of the camera and the front badge; it comes back on its own. "Malfunction" that stays: have it checked.

Do not drive when

- the brake pedal feels soft, spongy or sinks to the floor;
- the oil pressure or coolant temperature light is on;
- a tyre is flat, has a bulge or shows cords, or the steering shakes;
- the windscreen cannot be fully cleared of frost, mist or water;
- headlights or brake lights do not work after dark;
- a red light is on and you do not know what it means;
- you are too tired, too upset to concentrate, or impaired in any way, or facing weather you have never driven in.

4 When something goes wrong

Breakdown or warning on the road

- 1 **Hazard lights on** immediately. Find the button in the driveway, before you need it.
- 2 **Get the car somewhere safe** if it will still move: a car park, a side street, the far right of a wide shoulder. A narrow shoulder next to fast traffic is more dangerous than driving slowly to the next exit.
- 3 **Stay in the car with belts on** if getting out puts you next to moving traffic. Never stand directly in front of or behind the car on a shoulder.
- 4 **Call:** a parent, roadside assistance, or the emergency number, depending on what happened. Say where you are: road, direction, nearest exit or marker post.
- 5 **Smoke, fire or a strong fuel smell:** everyone out, move well away upwind, call the emergency number. Do not go back for belongings.

A flat tyre

Do not drive far on it: the wheel is damaged and control is reduced. Do not change a wheel beside fast traffic, on a slope or in the dark; call for help instead. If the spot is safe: car in Park or in gear, parking brake on, loosen the nuts before jacking, jack only at the marked points, tighten in a star pattern, and respect the 80 km/h (50 mph) limit of a space-saver spare.

A minor bump in a car park

- Stop, hazards on, check that nobody is hurt.
- Photograph both cars, the plates and the surroundings before anything moves.
- Exchange name, phone number and insurance details. Do not argue about fault.
- If the other car is unattended, leave a note with your name and number under the wiper and photograph the note in place; in many places driving off is an offence.
- Tell a parent or your insurer the same day.

The car will not start

- **Lights and dash work, engine clicks or cranks slowly:** the battery. A jump start or a jump pack, following the connection order in the owner's manual (red to the dead battery's positive first, last black clamp to bare metal of the dead car, never its battery).
- **Starts with a jump but dies minutes later:** the charging system. Do not keep driving; it will stall again.
- **Nothing at all, not even dash lights:** a flat battery, a loose terminal, or the key not recognised. Try the spare key.
- **Cranks normally but will not fire:** not a battery problem. Call for help rather than cranking until the battery is flat too.

Tell someone about every warning light, even one that went away. A photo of the dashboard sent to a parent costs nothing and is how a small repair stays small.

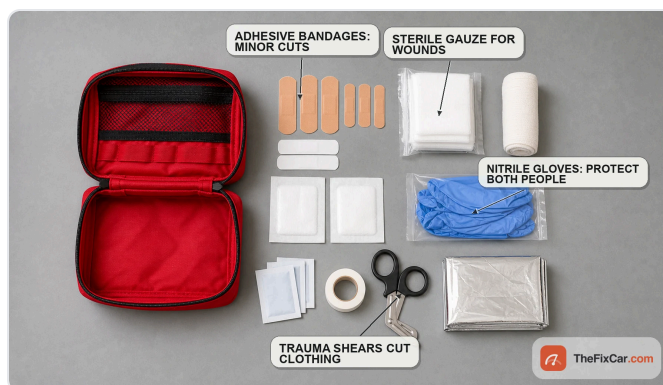
5 What to keep in the car

LEVEL	ITEMS
Essential	Phone charger; written emergency contacts; current insurance card and registration; torch; reflective warning triangle or vest; tyre pressure gauge; small first-aid kit; water; a blanket or warm layer.
Useful	Jump pack or jumper cables; portable tyre inflator; paper copy of key phone numbers; ice scraper in winter; sunglasses; a little cash.
Optional	Roadside assistance card; dash cam; notepad and pen for exchanging details.

First-aid kit: the essential layer

- ☐ Adhesive bandages in several sizes
- ☐ Sterile gauze pads and a roller bandage
- ☐ Medical tape
- ☐ Antiseptic wipes in sealed packets
- ☐ Nitrile gloves, two pairs
- ☐ Blunt-tip trauma shears and tweezers
- ☐ Foil emergency blanket
- ☐ Any medication the household depends on, in its labelled container

Check dates and restock twice a year. Keep the kit in the cabin or an easy-reach part of the boot, not under the luggage. Heat ruins adhesives and some medicines; carry heat-sensitive medicines with you rather than leaving them in a parked car.



A kit chosen on purpose: bandages, gauze, gloves, shears, tape and a foil blanket. Everything else is an addition.

Call the emergency number instead of driving when

- someone may have a neck, spine or serious head injury: keep them still;
- chest pain, sudden weakness on one side, slurred speech, trouble breathing;
- bleeding that firm pressure does not stop;
- you are the one injured, dizzy or in shock: pull over, call, stay put.

6 Common mistakes, and the one-page version

MISTAKE	BETTER
Holding the phone for maps	A mount, or the phone in a bag with audio directions. Holding it keeps it in reach for everything else.
Ignoring the tyre pressure light	Check all four with a gauge. A badly underinflated tyre changes handling and can fail.
Not knowing where the hazard switch is	Press it once in the driveway.
Driving tired after school or a shift	Losing focus on a familiar route is the signal to stop, not to push through.
Not mentioning a warning light	A photo to a parent the same day.
Changing a tyre beside traffic	Move to a safer place first, or call for help.
Treating the limit as the target	Lower in rain, fog, traffic, car parks, school zones and on unfamiliar roads.
Passengers as entertainment	With new drivers, each extra passenger raises crash risk; keep the first months quiet.

Sources and further reading

- Teen driver car safety checklist. thefixcar.com/safety/teen-driver-car-safety-checklist/
- Student driver campus car safety checklist. thefixcar.com/safety/student-driver-campus-car-safety-checklist/
- Car first aid kit checklist. thefixcar.com/safety/car-first-aid-kit-checklist/
- Winter car emergency kit checklist. thefixcar.com/safety/winter-car-emergency-kit-checklist/
- Jumper cable connection order. thefixcar.com/safety/jumper-cable-connection-order/
- NHTSA, Teen Driving; IIHS, Teenagers: graduated licensing and passenger risk; the owner's manual for the car.

The one-page version (cut out, keep in the door pocket)

Before moving: belts · phone silent and away · mirrors · route set · no warning lights · fuel · nothing by the pedals.

Before leaving: walk around · lights work · tyre light off · parking brake off.

Driving: phone out of reach · space ahead · speed for the conditions.

Night: lights checked before dark · cabin dim · know the high-beam switch.

Weather: wipers · demisters · tread · extra time.

Stop now if: red light · soft pedal · flat or shaking · cannot clear the glass · too tired.

Trouble: hazards on · safe place · stay belted · call · smoke or fuel smell: out and away.

General guidance for new drivers and the adults helping them. Local licensing rules (passenger limits, night curfews, phone laws) apply on top of everything here, and the owner's manual is the authority for the car. © thefixcar.com, 2026. Free to print and distribute unchanged for non-commercial use, including driver education, school and campus safety programmes.