

Winter Driving

Are Your Community and Home Care Workers Prepared?



SHIFT
INTO WINTER



Every day community and home care workers across British Columbia spend a significant amount of time on the road driving vehicles as part of their work. Tight schedules, unexpected demands, and a potential lack of familiarity with routes and locations puts workers at high risk when on the road.

Winter is an especially dangerous time for those drive for work. Unpredictable weather, reduced traction, cold temperatures and limited visibility increase the likelihood of a serious motor vehicle crash.

The risk of being in a motor vehicle crash increases by 27% during November through January. According to WorkSafeBC, there were 263 motor vehicle incident time-loss claims for the health care sector during those months from 2016 to 2021. Community Health Support Services accounted for almost half (126) of those crashes.

The following information will help reduce the risk your workers face when driving during winter months. Enhanced employee safety leads to better client outcomes, reduced organizational costs, and improved business performance. Meeting your health and safety responsibilities is a win-win for everyone.

Understand your legal responsibilities as an employer

- As an employer or supervisor, you're legally responsible for the safety of your workers when they drive for work, whether they're on the road all day or just once or twice a week, and regardless of whether they are driving a company-owned vehicle or their own personal vehicle.
- You must follow the safety requirements set out in the [**Workers Compensation Act**](#), and the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation.
- You have a responsibility to establish and maintain an effective safety program that addresses the hazards faced by your workers. You must also provide information, instruction, training and supervision necessary to ensure the health and safety of your workers. This includes ensuring that any community and home care worker driving for work in winter conditions is qualified to do so and has a vehicle that can safely handle winter road and weather conditions.



Four actions to reduce the risk of a winter driving crash

As an employer or supervisor, make your safety expectations clear when it comes to your workforce driving for work in winter conditions. Develop and implement an inclement weather policy, including the information below, and ensure your staff is effectively trained on it.

1. Determine if driving for work is necessary

- Direct your community and home care workers to always check road and weather conditions at [DriveBC.ca](https://drivebc.ca) or your local news or weather service BEFORE leaving home **to determine whether it's safe to drive.**
- Encourage your workers to not drive if weather conditions are unsafe, or worsening. Ask them to cancel, reschedule or re-route trips when necessary. Where possible, eliminate the hazards by looking for other ways to conduct business such as email, telephone, or public transit to eliminate the need to drive.

2. Plan the trip

- If driving is necessary, direct workers to develop a trip plan including: determining the safest route, alternate routes in case of closures or conditions, rest breaks and who and when they'll be checking in with. Make sure they leave early to avoid rushing.
- Ask them to determine whether their vehicle is right for the trip; is it equipped for road and weather conditions?
- Require them to consider whether they are prepared and fit to drive; are they fatigued or on medication? Do they have appropriate snacks and water available?
- Direct your workers to contact their supervisor if they are not fit/able to drive.

3. Prepare workers' vehicles

A prepared vehicle means a safer journey. Do not wait until the snow, black ice, rain, fog, extended periods of darkness and colder temperatures hit. Instruct community and home care workers to:

- Maintain their vehicle according to manufacturer's instructions.
- Check wiper blades and windshield washer fluid.

- Before driving, remove snow and ice from windows, lights, mirrors and vehicle surfaces. Ask them to familiarize themselves with their vehicle's safety features and adjust mirrors, seats, steering wheels and head rests.

- Install four-matched winter tires with the three-peaked mountain and snowflake symbol for better traction in cold weather (7°C or less). Most B.C. highways require passenger vehicles to use Mud and Snow (M+S) or three-peaked mountain and snowflake tires between October 1 and March 31.
- Keep the gas tank full to prevent fuel lines from freezing.
- Keep first-aid supplies and a winter survival kit in the vehicle. See [ShiftIntoWinter.ca](https://shiftintowinter.ca) for a list of recommended items to include.
- Drive cell free and secure their phone out of reach (in the glove box or console).



4. Drive for the conditions

Make sure drivers know how to drive for the conditions before they get behind the wheel. Consider asking a driving expert to do a winter driving presentation for employees. Staff meetings are another opportunity to discuss safe winter driving.

- Drop speed to match road conditions. The posted speed is the maximum speed under ideal road conditions.
- Maintain a safe following distance - at least four seconds. It takes longer to stop on a slippery road.
- Learn or be trained in winter driving skills such as how to brake safely and get out of a skid.
- Comply with traffic laws.

Additional resources

Visit [ShiftintoWinter.ca](https://shiftintowinter.ca) for a free online [Winter Driving Safety for Employers and Supervisors course](https://shiftintowinter.ca). You'll also find an [employer toolkit](https://shiftintowinter.ca) with tips on developing and maintaining your own winter driving safety program.

[ShiftintoWinter.ca](https://shiftintowinter.ca)

[DriveBC.ca](https://drivebc.ca)

[RoadSafetyAtWork.ca](https://roadsafetyatwork.ca)

[SafeCareBC.ca](https://safecarebc.ca)

[WorkSafeBC.com](https://worksafebc.com)