

Regional driving



Two thirds (67 per cent) of fatalities on NSW roads occur on country roads.

Driving in regional, rural and remote areas of NSW can be a challenging task. Environmental factors such as poorer road condition and design, higher speed limits, increased roadside hazards and few public transport or other options contribute to a greater risk and severity of a crash on regional roads. Behaviours such as speeding, driving tired and drink driving also play a role. Understanding these unique challenges is essential before you set off on your drive.



The facts

- Around 81 per cent of all fatal crashes on country roads involve local residents.
- Around 78 per cent of all country fatal crashes occur on roads with a speed limit of 80km/h or more, with 47 per cent occurring in 100km/h zones.
- Speed is a factor in 44 per cent of all fatal crashes on country roads, followed by fatigue (24 per cent) and illegal alcohol (18 per cent).

Driving on country roads

High speed roads

Roads between regional towns are often single-lane and high speed. Higher speeds and fewer safety measures such as barriers mean that country roads are less forgiving in a crash.

Speeding, particularly on curves, is a key issue on country roads. Slow down when approaching curves and intersections, always stay under the speed limit, follow advisory speed signs and drive to the conditions.

Driving along stretches of straight road may lead to a loss of concentration, and long hours behind the wheel will result in physical and mental fatigue. During a four-second microsleep, a car travelling at 100km/h will travel 111 metres while completely out of the driver's control. Plan regular rest breaks on long trips or if you are feeling tired, take a break and have a nap – 20 minutes works best.

Narrow and unsealed roads

Many country roads are narrow, with many curves and lack more advanced safety features found on highways and motorways. On narrow roads it may be necessary to drive slower than the speed limit.

Some country roadsides have unsealed shoulders. Vehicles that leave the road are at risk of losing control and crashing. Slow down in these road environments and drive to the condition of the road.

Some country roads aren't sealed – you'll drive on surfaces made of gravel, sand or dirt. Driving on unsealed roads can be challenging – tyres can lose traction and loose dirt and gravel can be thrown up by other vehicles. On unsealed roads vehicles take longer to stop and are harder to control and all vehicles are at risk of skidding, sliding or rollover. When driving on unsealed roads, slow down and increase the distance between you and other vehicles.

Weather can also affect driving conditions on unsealed roads. Dry weather can create dust and limit your visibility, while wet weather can make roads muddy, slippery and boggy.

Overtaking

Overtaking other vehicles can be dangerous. The difficulty with overtaking is judging the space required to complete the manoeuvre safely.

When overtaking you must not go over the speed limit. Always make sure the road ahead is clear and that there is sufficient space for you to complete the manoeuvre.

You must not overtake across a single unbroken dividing line, double unbroken dividing line or double dividing lines with an unbroken line closer to you. Never overtake where a road narrows or on approaching a crest, curve or any limited vision situation.

Bad weather

Avoid driving in wet, icy, snowy or foggy conditions wherever possible as this can increase the risk of a crash, even for experienced drivers on routes they know well.

If you need to travel or are already travelling when bad weather occurs:

- Slow down and drive to the conditions.
- In severe conditions pull over in a safe place and wait for it to pass.
- Keep a safe distance from the vehicle in front. This should be at least a four second gap.
- Brake gently in wet or icy conditions to avoid skidding and losing traction. Brake early and accelerate slowly.
- Be aware of frost or ice on the roads in winter, especially on bridges and in shaded or low-lying areas.
- Drive with daytime running lights on, or if your vehicle is not fitted with them, put your headlights on low beam. If your vehicle has fog lights you should only use these if driving in fog, mist or other conditions that restrict your visibility.

Dusty conditions

Dust severely limit yours visibility. Avoid travelling if there is a dust storm, but if one occurs while you are driving:

- Do not overtake other vehicles.
- Pull over in a safe place, stop, and wait for the visibility to improve. Turn on your lights so other vehicles can see you.
- Switch your airconditioning to recirculate so you do not get dust in the cabin.

Avoid driving at sunrise and sunset

Many roads in NSW have an east-west orientation. When the sun is low in the sky (at sunrise and sunset), clear vision is particularly difficult, meaning you might not see oncoming vehicles or animals.

Wildlife and other animals

One in every 38 casualty crashes on country roads involves a vehicle hitting an animal but one in 10 casualty crashes on country roads involve a vehicle hitting an animal or crashing after swerving to avoid an animal. Wildlife such as kangaroos, wombats and emus can be fast moving and extremely unpredictable. Stray stock and domestic animals can also wander onto the road unexpectedly and it is hard to know what they will do next. Avoid driving around sunrise and sunset where possible. If you need to drive at these times, use extra caution by slowing down and being prepared. Remember to:

- **Be aware** – animals are more active near waterholes and creeks, and harder to see at dawn and dusk.
- **Reduce your speed** – slow down when you see animal warning signs.
- **Stay alert** – animals are unpredictable, so expect the unexpected.
- **Brake safely** – always apply your brakes in a controlled manner.
- **Never swerve** – it's safer to hit an animal than swerve and lose control of your vehicle.
- **Report injured wildlife** – call WIRES on 1300 094 737.

Floodwater

If you come across a flooded road, do not attempt to drive through, no matter what type of vehicle you are driving. If you're travelling in a flood prone area it's important to monitor any warnings issued by the Bureau of Meteorology (bom.gov.au/nsw/warnings) and to first check Live Traffic NSW (livetraffic.com) before you start your trip.

One of the biggest hazards hidden by floodwaters can be washaways, where parts of the road have been destroyed by the fast-moving water.

Vehicle safety

Vehicle choice and the safety features of the vehicle make a major difference in the event of a crash.

The crash rates of utility vehicles (utes) are twice as high on country roads as on metropolitan roads. Utes typically have less safety features compared to passenger vehicles. Additionally, the braking and steering performance of utes is reduced under loads and can be exacerbated on twisting and turning roads.

Always purchase the safest vehicle you can afford. Choosing a 5 star Australasian New Car Assessment Program (ANCAP) or Used Car Safety Rating with Safe Pick (towardszero.nsw.gov.au/safesystem/safe-vehicles) can mean the difference between you being seriously injured or killed in a crash or avoiding a crash altogether.

Sharing the road with heavy vehicles

Take extra care around heavy vehicles

There are different types of heavy vehicles on regional roads including trucks, buses, agricultural and mining vehicles.

Due to their size and weight, heavy vehicles need a longer distance to stop than a car. Avoid merging too closely in front of heavy vehicles as this reduces their stopping distance and can leave them without enough room to slow down or stop safely.

Due to their size and length, heavy vehicles also have larger blind spots than the average car. This means heavy vehicle drivers may not be able to see cars driving behind them or around them.

Always ensure you slow down and give way to heavy vehicles and avoid driving in their blind spots.

Take extra care when overtaking heavy vehicles in bad weather or dusty conditions as the driver's visibility is further reduced.

Essential tips

> Choose the right vehicle

Ensure your vehicle is fit for the route and roads you intend to take.

> Travel on the safest route

Always plan your route and prioritise roads with better safety features such as major highways. Motorways and major highways generally have barriers to prevent cars from running off the road and hitting objects such as trees or colliding head-on with other vehicles. These safety features are usually not present on local roads.

> Drive at safe speeds

Stay under the speed limit, follow advisory speed signs, drive to the weather and road conditions, and always keep a safe distance between you and the vehicle in front.

> Avoid driving when tired

Watch out for the early warning signs of tiredness. These include yawning, difficulty concentrating, feeling drowsy, experiencing slow reaction times, sore/tired eyes, restlessness, boredom or oversteering. Pull over for a break in a safe place if any of these signs appear.

> Wear your seatbelt

Always wear your seatbelt and ensure all passengers are wearing theirs.

> Don't drink alcohol and drive

If you plan to drive, don't drink alcohol. Always have a Plan B to get home safely if you intend to drink.

> Don't drive after taking illegal drugs

Don't take any illegal or illicit drugs if you plan to drive and check if any medications you are taking could affect your driving.

In NSW, it is illegal to drive with any amount of illegal drugs in your system. Illegal drugs can be detected in your saliva by a mobile drug test (MDT) for a significant time after drug use, even if you feel you are OK to drive.

> Avoid being distracted

Being distracted when driving, such as by a mobile phone, increases the risk of a crash. It is illegal to use a hand-held phone while driving.

If using a hands-free mobile phone, drivers must comply with the mobile phone rules for their licence type. The safest thing to do is avoid using a mobile phone at all while driving. This could include parking somewhere safe to make or answer a phone call or using a 'do not disturb' function on your phone while driving. If in-car phone use is necessary and you hold a full (unrestricted) licence, put your phone into a mobile phone holder or connect your phone to your vehicle's Bluetooth function.

For more information on mobile phone rules, visit roadsafety.transport.nsw.gov.au/stayingsafe/mobilephones/know-the-rules.html

Plan ahead

Before you drive, make sure you:

- Check tyres, lights, windscreen wipers and washer fluid, battery, coolant and hoses, oil, and ensure you have enough fuel to make it the next service station. It's also a good idea to carry a first aid kit and water.
- Assess your tiredness before you drive. If in doubt, do not drive. Visit testyourtiredself.com.au.
- Get a good night's sleep before you leave to avoid being tired when you start driving.
- Plan your breaks before you start your trip. Make sure you take regular breaks. Allow time in your journey for rest breaks.
- Plan when and where you can stop for fuel. In remote areas there are limited service stations.
- Give your friends, family, or (if driving for work) your manager or colleague the details of your route and expected arrival time.
- Charge your mobile phone in the event you need it in an emergency. It should work in regional centres, but may not operate in areas in-between. If there is likely to be no mobile phone coverage in the area you are travelling, consider another route or carry another type of communication device such as a satellite phone, SPOT tracker or EPIRB. If your provider does not have coverage, check for 'SOS only' to make calls in an emergency.
- Check the weather forecast along your route and if necessary, delay your trip.

More information

Visit the Transport for NSW road safety website (roadsafety.transport.nsw.gov.au) for information on driving on country roads, breakdown safety (roadsafety.transport.nsw.gov.au/downloads/breakdown_safety_dl1), animals on country roads (roadsafety.transport.nsw.gov.au/stayingsafe/drivers/animalsoncountryroads/index), driving in bad weather (roadsafety.transport.nsw.gov.au/stayingsafe/drivers/badweather/index) and other important road safety topics.

If you're driving for work, visit the Towards Zero website (towardszero.nsw.gov.au/workplace) to complete the Road safety: Everybody's business online learning course to learn about road safety risk and how you can stay safe on NSW roads.

