



# Winter Road Safety:





# Avoiding and Managing Black Ice Accidents

Black ice is the bane of winter driving and the epitome of **hidden danger**. And it's virtually **impossible to avoid**.

After all, most American roads—including nearly every inch of roadway in Washington—are susceptible to ice during the colder months.

What makes black ice so uniquely dangerous, and what can you do to stay safe?

## How black ice causes car accidents

Black ice provides next to no traction, rendering steering and braking nearly useless. Vehicles tend to slide and lose control even at low speeds.

It's also **next to invisible**. Despite its name, "black" ice is actually clear or grayish, and only appears black because of the road surface showing through.



Incidents often play out as follows:

1. A driver **can't see** black ice from a distance, and hits the slick patch at higher-than-ideal speed.
2. The wheels **lose traction** and the vehicle slides freely.
3. Amid the **sheer panic**, the driver may overreact by braking hard or steering suddenly. This causes a spin—or worse—once the tires regain traction.

We don't know *exactly* how many accidents black ice causes. We do know that icy or snowy roads in general account for **about a quarter** of weather-related accidents every year. Roughly speaking, ice probably contributes to hundreds of fatalities and tens of thousands injuries at minimum.

## How to avoid car accidents on black ice

It's impossible to avoid black ice altogether, but it's within your power to adopt **potentially life-saving habits** of caution.

### Keep your momentum in check

Momentum is the enemy on black ice. Limit it, and stay safe, by driving at **low speed** and exercising an **abundance of caution** at all times.

Don't try to keep up with faster drivers, many of whom foolishly ignore the possibility of black ice.





## Mind corners, in particular

Slow, steady driving is doubly important in corners. In icy conditions, it's prudent to **assume** that every corner contains black ice, and reduce your speed accordingly.

## Brake early, brake gently

**Soft, preemptive braking** is a good winter driving practice in general. It helps take advantage of whatever traction is available, and minimizes impact if the worst should happen.

## Take signs seriously

Finally, **heed** ice warning signs. Local authorities often place them in potentially slick areas, but motorists often **fail to take them seriously**.

## Consider the conditions

There's always some risk of black ice in the winter, but a few conditions greatly raise the odds:

- Calm, clear nights and early mornings.
- Light precipitation when temperatures are near or below freezing.
- Shady areas, e.g., the shadows of buildings or woods.

Keep in mind that ice that is visible during the day may become invisible after dark or during low light. Unfortunately, that makes up for a large part of our driving time during those short winter days.



# What to do if you're in a black ice accident

We've previously covered [what to do following a car accident](#) in more detail. The same guidelines apply following an incident on black ice, too.

Once you're out of the heat of the moment, consider contacting the auto accident specialists at Bridge Law to evaluate your legal options. Many drivers are unaware of the insurance complexities and liability questions that may arise from seemingly simple incidents.

**If you've crashed on black ice, then [reach out today](#) for a confidential consultation.**

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