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Put safe travel at the top of your holiday list

Courtesy of Metro News Service

The nation's highways and skyways experience an influx of travelers during the holiday season. People are on the move over the last five weeks of the calendar year, traveling near and far to spend the holidays with friends and family members they hold dear. In fact, the United States Department of Transportation says the Thanksgiving and Christmas/New Year's holiday periods are among the busiest long-distance travel periods of the year.

Roughly 90 percent of holiday travel takes place by personal vehicle, followed by air, bus and train, says the USDOT. With so many people on the move, the risk for accidents and other incidents increases. To keep the holidays enjoyable and safe, travelers should remember to exercise caution.

- **Schedule a tune-up.** Make sure your car is in good working order. Check the air pressure in tires and get an oil change if it is time. Other cars on the road may kick up salt and other debris from the roadways, so be certain to top off windshield washer fluid to maintain adequate visibility.

- **Leave plenty of time.** Expect traffic and leave extra time to get to your destination. Hurrying may cause you to increase your speed or make risky maneuvers behind the wheel that can increase your risk of accident and injury. Leave extra time as well for traveling through weather conditions like snow and sleet.

- **Know various routes to the destination.** Volume or accidents can result in road detours. Keep a paper map in the car or rely on navigation systems.

- **Leave room for emergency supplies.** Stock your vehicle with a change of clothes, blankets, snacks and drinks, jumper cables, a flashlight, and additional safety supplies. Drivers should be prepared in the event of a breakdown.

- **Keep children entertained.** A long trip can seem longer with unhappy children in tow. Plan ahead with some activities to keep kids occupied while on the road. Games, books, videos, and music can fill the time. Make frequent stops so kids can get out of the car and stretch. And don't forget to pack some food and drinks to cut down on time-consuming rest stop visits.

- **Take turns driving.** Spending long hours behind the wheel can cause fatigue. Share driving responsibilities with another adult passenger to help avoid drowsy driving conditions. If no one else is available to share the load, pull over and rest from time to time.

- **Secure packages and luggage.** Tie down items on roof racks and in rear cargo areas of SUVs and vans so they're not moving around freely. In the event of an accident, items that are not secured can be dangerous. Pack gifts and other items so that the driver's line of sight is not impeded.

If holiday travel is in your future, remember to make safety a priority.

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