

WHAT TO DO IF YOU HIT A DEER

What Are My Chances of Hitting a Deer? ____

A recent study by the University of Washington found that the deer is the most dangerous mammal in North America to humans.



According to the Department of Motor Vehicles, a car collides with some form of wildlife every **39 minutes** in the United States. **1 in every 17** car collisions involves 'wandering wildlife'. Surprisingly, **89%** of all wildlife collisions occur on roads with 2 lanes, and **84%** of all wildlife collisions occur in good weather on dry roads.



According to research from the University of Connecticut, the hour from **5-6pm** is the most common time for accidents of any type, although the most common hours of car-deer collisions are **6-10pm**. The most common month for collisions between deer and vehicles is **November**, which is during the deer breeding season and deer are more active.

Deer to vehicle collisions are rising in number, driven by both increasing numbers of cars on the roads, and rising deer numbers resulting from a decline in predators such as wolves and cougars.

One of the mooted solutions for reducing vehicle to deer collisions has been to **release cougars** into the wild. It is estimated that 30 years of cougars in the Eastern United States would prevent five human fatalities from deer collisions each year.



The vast majority of car-deer collisions result in only property damage; however, for drivers, the two key



statistics according to the DMV are that around 200 drivers die each year as a result of colliding with wildlife and that the average repair cost of hitting a deer is \$2,800.

A study by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety estimated that, across the United States as a whole, there are 1.5 million traffic collisions involving deer, causing a total of \$1.1 billion in vehicle damage.

How to Avoid Hitting a Deer

Although deer usually bolt into the road with little or no warning, there are steps you can take to minimize the danger of having a collision, or for the collision to be a serious one.



The number one way of reducing the danger of a potential deer collision is to wear your seatbelt.

Most people who are injured in collisions with deer were not wearing their seatbelt. Naturally, this won't reduce your likelihood of colliding with a deer but will make collisions less dangerous. You should also ensure that all your passengers are wearing their seatbelts, as those in the rear of the car may be thrown against those in the front in the event of a sudden deceleration.



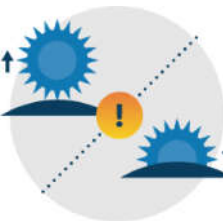
Being aware of the potential of deer will mean you're more prepared to react when you do see one.

The most obvious example of this is to use the animal-crossing signs as a guide. These are placed in areas where wildlife regularly enters the roadway. If you come to one of those signs, be extra vigilant and reduce your speed. Deer have eyes that reflect headlights, which can be a useful tool in poor light.



Be aware also of regular deer habitats.

According to the University of Illinois, deer often use 'woodlots, fencerows, field edges or areas near water' as habitats. You should, therefore, be additionally careful when you are on roads near these areas as it is more likely that deer will be present.



The most common time for collisions with deer is dawn and dusk.

Be extra vigilant during those times, especially because the light is often poor. According to the DMV, headlights have an illumination range of 200-250 feet, which means at night, or in poor conditions, your driving speed should be 45 mph in areas where there are animal crossing signs – 30 mph if conditions are icy. You should also use your bright headlights where possible (i.e. when it doesn't blind oncoming traffic).

In icy conditions, road salt may attract deer, so it can be especially risky to be driving in areas where deer are common. You should also avoid tailgating in areas where you see the animal crossing signs; because deer may be present, the driver in front of you may need to make an emergency stop.



If you see an animal on the road shoulder, be especially alert.

Deer can be unpredictable, and may actually run into the road upon your approach. Deer often cross roads in single file. If you see one deer crossing the road, there is a strong chance that another will be following close behind. Use your horn, even from distance, to make them aware of your presence, and continue to do so to attempt to prevent them from moving in front of you. If you see one deer, you are likely to see more, so slow right down if you do.

Should I Get a Deer Whistle? _____

Some manufacturers sell deer whistles that attach to the outside of your car. These whistles are powered by the movement of your car and make a high-pitched noise that is audible over a quarter of a mile away.



However, according to Purdue University, there is no evidence that deer whistles work, as deer don't necessarily recognize the whistle noise as threatening, and therefore don't have time to react.

What to Do When a Collision is Imminent? ___

If you have followed all of the above advice, but a collision with a deer is imminent, then it is not advisable to attempt to swerve. A deer's path is unpredictable, so swerving is no guarantee of missing the deer. Swerving may also put you in the path of oncoming traffic, or cause you to lose control of the vehicle.

If you realize you are going to hit a deer, you should take the following three steps (if possible):



Lock the brakes



Press the horn



Duck low behind the dashboard

The biggest danger to a driver is the deer coming **through the windshield** onto the driver. The DMV state that an exception to their advice is in the case of collision with a moose. Given a moose's size and build, they can be exceptionally dangerous to collide with, and they recommend that swerving is always a better option.



What Should I Do After the Collision? _____

If someone in the car is injured, your first call should be to the emergency services. Safety must be the first priority. If possible, and if safe to do so, move your car off the road, or at least in a position where it will cause the least possible danger and inconvenience to other drivers. You should not assume that your car is safe to drive.

Run the following visual checks on your car:



Check all your lights. Even if they appear undamaged, do a visual check by turning them on and confirming they are operations.

Check for loose parts, even in areas that were not directly involved in the collision.

Check for leaking fluid underneath the car.

Check your hood. In the event of a head-on collision, your hood may not latch properly. In this case, it is liable to fly open when you drive.



If you believe your vehicle to be unsafe to drive in any way, you should **call for a tow rather than attempting to drive.**

Turn your **hazard lights** on to alert other drivers of the presence of your car. If you can't move your vehicle off the road, use the orange triangle a safe distance behind on the road to warn drivers to slow down. This is particularly true if you have collided at dawn or dusk, when your vehicle may be less visible.





Once you know there is no immediate danger, you should file a **police report**. Although this is not compulsory, it will help if there are any problems with the insurance company at a later date. If your insurance company does not believe you have hit a deer, then they may refuse to pay out under your comprehensive coverage and instead charge it to your collision coverage. If you do file a police report, be sure to get the number of the report. Keep a record of this information.

You should also **take photos** of the car and the scene on your camera phone (or camera). Having as much information and evidence as possible will make the insurance process far more likely to go in your favor. If you or other drivers have injuries, then take photos of those.



If other witnesses stop, take down their account of what took place. You should also record their name and contact information.



Under no circumstances should you approach the deer. A wounded deer in a frightened state or state of shock has the potential to cause serious injury and will be acting unpredictably.



If you are waiting for a tow or for the emergency services and your car is in a safe place, **wait in the vehicle**. If your car is not in a safe place, remain with your car a safe distance away.

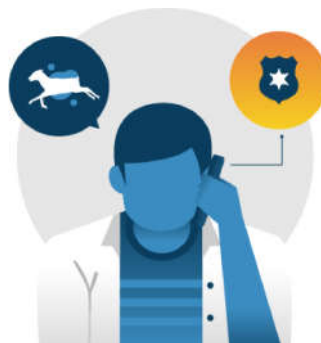


Do not walk too far from your vehicle, especially in wooded areas, as there is a chance of becoming lost.

What Happens to the Deer?

If the deer is still alive but immobile, you must call law enforcement.

Do not attempt to euthanize the deer yourself. This is extremely unsafe as well as being illegal. It is unlikely that you will have the means to do it safely and efficiently anyway.



You must also call law enforcement if the deer is blocking the road.

The police bear ultimate responsibility for moving the vehicle from the roadway and is not something you should attempt yourself.



If the deer is dead, and you are the owner of the vehicle, you are **allowed to keep** the carcass of the deer. In that instance, you must report the accident to the police, who will be able to advise on getting a 'carcass tag' which is required to either take the deer carcass home or take it to a butcher.

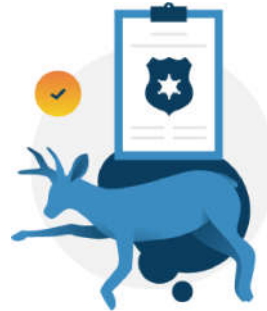
What If I See a Deer Someone Else Has Killed?

In some states, such as Illinois, if you find a deer someone else has killed, you may be able to claim it.

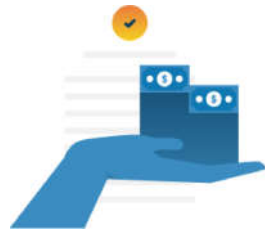
In these instances, you need to **get permission** from a Conservation Police Officer or Regional Officer, who will determine that you did not illegally kill or injure the deer.



However, you are not permitted to sell the deer carcass.



Who Will Pay for the Damage?



Usually, a collision with a deer will be covered by a driver's **car insurance**, although it does depend on the type of policy in use. Unlike a collision with another driver, a collision with a deer places all of the financial burdens on your own insurance company. As a result, you will need to have comprehensive insurance coverage as part of your policy, or you will bear the entire cost yourself. Blame is irrelevant.

Assuming you do have the right kind of coverage, your insurance will pay for the repairs, minus the cost of the deductible, which you will be responsible for. Most insurance policies will have very clear guidelines on their approach to collisions with wildlife, so be sure to **check your insurance documents**.



FOR EXAMPLE



If you have a **\$500 deductible**, and a deer collision causes **\$2,000** of damage to your car, the insurance company will pay **\$1,500** of the repairs, and you will be responsible for paying the remaining **\$500 deductible**.

In cases where you swerve to avoid hitting a deer and have a collision with oncoming traffic or a tree, your vehicle may also be covered, although this will fall under collision insurance rather than comprehensive.



Sources and Further Reading

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