

# Vehicle safety inspections: a step-by-step guide

Pre-trip motor vehicle inspections—also known as circle checks—should be performed regularly.



Whether you're a commercial trucker or just someone who drives for work, inspecting your vehicle before hitting the road helps you identify potential hazards that could cause a breakdown or worse. And ensuring that safety features are functioning properly reduces the risk of collisions and injuries to yourself and others. You should perform certain checks every day and others at least weekly—and report any concerns to ensure they're addressed before you start driving.

## What to inspect daily

### 1 Oil and fluids

- With engine off, pop the hood and pull out the oil dipstick; wipe off any excess oil.
- Put dipstick all the way back into oil tank tube, then withdraw it again slowly. Make sure dipstick indicates that oil is at operating level.
- Check all fluid levels—including brake fluid, engine coolant, power steering fluid, and windshield wiper reservoirs—to ensure that they are within safe operating range.

### 2 Belts, hoses, and cables

- Visually inspect belts and hoses for evidence of leaks, kinks, splits, cracks, or abrasions.
- Tug them gently to confirm they're secure.
- On commercial vehicles, check cables connecting the tractor and trailer.

### 3 Tires

- Visually inspect for proper inflation, or use a rubber mallet: a hollow sound indicates reduced air pressure.
- Check for any unusual wear or damage.

### 4 Air brakes (if applicable)

- Secure the vehicle and test the low air pressure warning device and air pressure buildup time.
- Confirm air compressor governor settings.
- Test the air loss rate.
- If you have a trailer, test the automatic application of trailer brakes and tractor protection valve.
- Check proper operation of the spring brakes.
- Drain air tanks and inspect air brake adjustment at each wheel.

### 5 Lights

- Turn on your vehicle and switch on headlights.
- From outside the vehicle, check that headlights are working and bright.
- Repeat with high beams, low beams, fog lights, tail lights, and four-way hazard lights.

### 6 Windshield

- Check for chips and cracks—and make sure the inside and outside of the windshield is clean.
- In winter, clear any accumulated snow and ice—and ensure your snow brush/scrapper is in good condition.





## What to inspect weekly\*

### 15 Tires

- Check tread depth: it should be at least 2 mm for summer tires and 4 mm for winter tires.
- Confirm spare tire is inflated to recommended pressure and stowed securely.
- Ensure vehicle jack and tire wrench are in good working order and stowed securely.

### 16 Brakes and steering

- Confirm the ABS system is working: while driving, find a quiet location with no other traffic (oncoming or behind you), grip the steering wheel, and then firmly apply brakes.
- Assess “free play” in your steering system to confirm it remains tight (i.e., no excess free play).

### 17 Battery

- Confirm battery is mounted securely and terminal connections are tight.
- Check battery terminals for signs of corrosion (e.g., white powdery substance around the terminals).

### 18 Licence plate and documents

- Visually inspect to ensure that plate-illuminating lights turn on.
- Check for any damage, cracks, or dirt on the light covers.
- Check expiry dates of insurance documents.
- Ensure expired documents are renewed before they expire.

### 19 And more...

- Make sure you have a fully stocked first aid kit. In winter, an emergency vehicle kit is also recommended.
- Have a spare jug of windshield washer fluid available (and stowed safely).
- Most vehicles are scheduled for service by certified technicians based on either mileage or by date. Observe your vehicle's current mileage and schedule a maintenance appointment if the recommended service date is approaching.

*\*If you drive a different vehicle each day, the suggested weekly inspection items should instead be checked daily (i.e., before you drive the “different” vehicle). Commercial drivers must complete a daily vehicle inspection report confirming that all inspection items meet the standards of the Highway Traffic Act and its regulations before driving on public roads.*



## More advice for vehicle operators



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