

DRIVING SAFELY DURING THE PANDEMIC

Resisting the temptation of the less-crowded road

■ Officials have noted an increase in average speeds as traffic volumes have dropped

By Patricia Sheridan
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

PITTSBURGH — The best way to drive safely during the pandemic is not to drive at all. But if you have to travel, several experts offered tips on how to make sure you and your loved ones get there and back safely.

With so many other drivers off the road, the most obvious safety tip is to resist the temptation to speed.

“There is an apparent increase in speeding in several areas across the U.S. That seems to be due to decreased traffic loads,” said Mike Speck, an instructor for the Ford Driving Skills for Life program.

Speck noted that the faster you go, the more likely you’ll have an accident, and that higher speeds lead to more serious injuries. He shares these and other tips in free Facebook Live sessions Mondays through Thursdays during April. The sessions, available at www.DrivingSkillsForLife.com, last about 20 minutes and are moderated by driving instructors.

Traffic is down 35% on the Pennsylvania Turnpike since early March, said turnpike spokesman Carl DeFebo, and that causes concern, especially in construction zones.

“Without the heavier traffic and congestion, which slows everyone down through construction zones, there is a propensity to drive faster,” he said. “What we are seeing is a free flow of traffic which I guess induces higher speeds.”

Don’t be lulled into thinking you are alone on the road, you can still get a speeding ticket because it is business as usual for state troopers on the turnpike.

“Actually citations and violations are down because traffic volume is down and



Dreamstime / TNS

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really we aren’t seeing a lot more speeding,” said Trooper Robert Broadwater of Troop B, based in Uniontown.

Troopers are more visible on the highways now. “We want to be seen, we want you to know we are out there,” Broadwater said. “We just really care about educating the motorist on the importance of staying home and the fact that there is a stay-at-home order. But if you have to go out be smart about it.”

“Many people can’t stay home because they have to go to work or get essentials, but they need to use common sense,” he said. “We are not out to hammer anyone, we just want you to stay safe.”

The state trooper was happy to report that Route 51, which he travels often, is very quiet.

“With Nemaquin (Woodlands Resort) closed, the only traffic you see on Route 40 is commercial traffic,” he said.

He offers this reason for seeing fewer speeders: “No one seems to be in a hurry because actually they don’t have anywhere to go.”

The turnpike has remained open during the pandemic, but cash or credit cards are no longer accepted for tolls.

“We have temporarily

activated all electronic tolling,” said Roseanne Placey, manager of media and public relations for the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission. “This is a temporary safety measure to keep travelers moving with no need to stop at tollbooths or interact with tolling personnel during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

E-ZPass users won’t notice the difference. For others, the turnpike will use its Toll-By-Plate program and photograph license plates as vehicles travel through tolling points.

Several experts suggested drivers make sure vehicles are in good working order. Check tires, oil and lights so you don’t end up stranded on the side of the road.

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Dreamstime / TNS

A good night’s sleep is a key factor in maintaining your health and protecting your immune system.

Sleep still vital to maintaining healthy lifestyle

Mayo Clinic News Network

In these days where there is high anxiety around COVID-19, getting your sleep isn’t easy. But a good night’s sleep is a key factor in maintaining your health and protecting your immune system.

“Sleep is so important. It can make you happier and healthier,” says Jenny Prinsen, a pulmonology nurse practitioner at Mayo Clinic Health System in Southwest Wisconsin. “It’s your time to recharge, so make it a priority.”

Sleep challenges

There are several factors that can affect your sleep.

• Snoring

Almost half of adult men and one-quarter of women snore. You can reduce snoring by using adhesive nose pads to open the nostrils, adjusting your pillow to open your airway, and sleeping on your side rather than your back.

• Caffeine intake

Caffeine may affect your sleep. Be mindful of hidden sources of caffeine in foods, beverages and medications. Even if you fall asleep, too much caffeine can affect the quality of your sleep.

• Challenges of parenting

Between 3 a.m. feedings and late-night cries, new parents might only get to sleep for a few hours here and there. Try snoozing whenever you put your infant down to sleep.

Tips to sleep better

The quality of your sleep is just as important as the quantity. You can be in bed for eight hours and still feel drowsy the next day if your sleep is frequently interrupted during the night.

• Create an ideal sleep environment.

Your sleep space should be dark, quiet, comfortable and cool. Think about using dark shades, earplugs, eyeshades, and subtle background noise such as humidifiers or fans.

• Follow a sleep schedule. Go to bed and wake up at the same time each day, including weekends. Consistency reinforces your body’s sleep-wake cycle and promotes better sleep.

• Give yourself time to unwind.

Create a relaxing routine before bedtime. Consider taking a warm bath or shower, reading a book or listening to soothing music. You also might try meditation or prayer to relax.

• Turn off the screens.

Dedicate 30 to 60 minutes before you go to sleep as time away from your electronic devices. Minimizing the bright light exposure gives your brain the time it needs to get sleepy.

• Use your bed for sleep. Don’t eat, work, use your phone, watch TV or do anything in bed that may keep you from relaxing and getting good sleep.

• Get regular physical activity.

Regular physical activity can promote better sleep by helping you fall asleep faster and enjoy deeper sleep. Exercise earlier in the day, if possible.

• Avoid caffeine.

Avoid consuming caffeine 10 hours before you want to fall asleep and avoid alcohol before bed, as it disrupts sleep.

If you follow these tips and still find yourself constantly craving sleep and feeling fatigued, talk to your health care provider to make sure that there isn’t an underlying sleep disorder.

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— Jenny Prinsen, pulmonology nurse practitioner, Mayo Clinic Health System

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