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The Road Traffic Management Corporation (RTMC)
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Member of the United Nations Road Safety Collaboration

PRESS RELEASE

To : All News Editors

Issued : Monday, 31 August 2026

Attention : News Reporters / Transport Reporters /Newswires

MOTORISTS, PEDESTRIANS AND TRANSPORT OPERATORS URGED TO STAY ALERT AS SPRING BRINGS CHANGING CONDITIONS

CENTURION: As South Africa moves into spring, road users are being urged to prepare for a season that can bring rapidly changing weather, reduced visibility and challenging driving conditions.

Spring in South Africa is more than a transition from winter to warmer weather. It can bring sudden thunderstorms, heavy downpours, strong winds, hail, lightning, mist and rapidly changing road conditions. In many areas, early mornings can remain cold and misty while afternoons become hot and stormy.

The first rains can also make roads particularly hazardous as water, dust, oil and other residues combine on the road surface.

As a general guide, road safety authorities are advising motorists to reduce speed, increase following distances, use headlights and avoid flooded areas.

The situation is made more risky because of mass events and concerts that are held in this season. These events encourage travel and are normally associated with night

time driving and alcohol consumption - behaviour that leads to road crashes and fatalities.

The risk is magnified by the presence of pedestrians who already account for almost half of South Africa's road deaths.

What makes spring driving different?

Spring weather can change within minutes. A sunny journey can quickly become a drive through torrential rain or a thunderstorm. Heavy rain can obscure road markings, reduce tyre grip, and create standing water. Strong winds can affect high-sided vehicles, while hail can damage windscreens and temporarily make it difficult to see.

Motorists should also be prepared for sun glare, particularly during early mornings and late afternoons, as well as mist in elevated areas and around the early morning and evening periods.

The first substantial rains following dry conditions can be especially deceptive: a road may look merely damp while providing considerably less grip than expected. Drivers should therefore adjust their speed and driving behaviour to the conditions rather than simply to the posted speed limit.

Advice for all motorists

Drivers are urged to:

- Slow down in rain, mist, hail and poor visibility. Speed must be appropriate for the conditions.
- Increase following distance. A three-second gap recommended in normal conditions should be extended in wet weather, darkness, congestion or poor visibility.
- Switch on headlights when visibility deteriorates so that other road users can see the vehicle.
- Avoid sudden braking, acceleration and steering, particularly on wet roads.
- Never drive through flooded roads, low-water bridges or areas where the depth of water is uncertain.

- Check tyres, brakes, windscreen wipers, lights, mirrors and demisters before travelling.
- Reduce speed before entering standing water and avoid unnecessary overtaking.
- Be particularly cautious around schools, taxi ranks, pedestrian crossings, informal settlements and areas where people walk alongside the road.
- Never use a mobile phone while driving and never drive under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Take regular breaks on long journeys and do not drive when fatigued.

A special message to pedestrians

Pedestrians are among the most vulnerable road users, particularly during spring storms and periods of poor visibility.

Pedestrians should:

- Wear bright or reflective clothing, especially during early mornings, evenings and rainy weather.
- Use pavements, pedestrian crossings and designated crossing points wherever available.
- Never assume that an approaching driver has seen you. Look in all directions before crossing, particularly when rain or an umbrella restricts visibility.
- Avoid crossing highways or walking on freeways.
- Where there is no pavement, walk facing oncoming traffic and as far from moving vehicles as safely possible.
- Keep children close and teach them never to run into the road.
- Take extra care around trucks and buses, where large blind spots can prevent drivers from seeing pedestrians.

Message to truck and heavy-vehicle drivers

Heavy vehicles require additional stopping distance and can be particularly vulnerable to strong winds, standing water and slippery roads.

Truck drivers and fleet operators should:

- Conduct proper pre-trip vehicle inspections, paying particular attention to tyres, brakes, lights, wipers and steering.
- Reduce speed in wet, windy or low-visibility conditions.
- Allow substantially more stopping distance and avoid following smaller vehicles too closely.
- Be alert to smaller vehicles entering blind spots or cutting in front of trucks.
- Take extra care when crossing bridges and exposed sections of road during strong winds.
- Never continue through floodwater simply because another vehicle has done so.
- Manage driver fatigue through proper journey planning and rest periods.
- Secure loads correctly and check load security after severe weather or difficult road conditions.
- Smaller vehicles should also remember that trucks cannot stop or change direction as quickly as passenger cars.
- Cutting in front of a truck and then braking sharply can leave the truck driver with insufficient stopping distance.

Scholar transport operators and schools

The safety of learners must receive particular attention during spring. Scholar transport operators should ensure that vehicles are roadworthy, properly maintained and appropriately licensed, and that every learner is properly seated and restrained where required.

Operators should:

- Never overload vehicles.
- Ensure that doors, tyres, brakes, lights and seatbelts are in good working order.
- Avoid speeding to meet school schedules.
- Never allow children to board or disembark in unsafe locations.
- Exercise extreme caution near schools during arrival and dismissal times.

- Reduce speed substantially in wet weather and when approaching pedestrian crossings.
- Ensure drivers are fit to drive and free from alcohol, drugs and fatigue.

Schools should ensure that scholar patrol arrangements are properly supervised and operated at registered crossings. Scholar patrol members must not move into the roadway to stop traffic, and adult supervision is essential.

Motorists approaching schools must obey scholar patrol stop signs and remain alert for children who may behave unpredictably.

Spring is a shared responsibility

Road safety cannot be left to traffic authorities or emergency services alone. Every journey involves a shared responsibility between motorists, truck drivers, pedestrians, passengers, cyclists, schools and transport operators.

South Africa is making progress in reducing crashes and fatalities, but recent road-safety reporting continues to show that pedestrian deaths remain an enormous concern.

The message this spring is simple: *slow down, stay visible, expect the unexpected and respect every road user.*

A few extra minutes on a journey are never more important than a human life.

ENDS.

ISSUED BY: THE ROAD TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT CORPORATION (RTMC)

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