Make a car emergency kit

Stash a bag of must-haves in your family’s car to prepare for the unexpected.

You probably already know some things about car safety, like how important it is to wear a seatbelt and that you should never distract the driver. But another important safety step you can take is making sure your family always has an emergency kit in the trunk in case you ever get stuck due to bad weather or an accident. This is particularly true in winter when conditions can be cold and roads might be hard to clear. Here’s how to get started.

Why it’s important

The reason you want to make a kit like this is that you don’t always have advance warning when something might go wrong, like when there’s an unexpected storm while you’re out, or you’re involved in an accident. It’s important even if your town doesn’t usually have severe weather. In fact, places where it doesn’t usually snow can often have the most problems with snowfall. That’s because when it does snow, people don’t have much experience driving in it, and towns may not be as prepared to clear the roads.

Find a bin or bag

Ask an adult to help you find something to pack your emergency kit in. Maybe you have an old backpack or duffel bag that you don’t need anymore. A plastic bin or milk crate is also a good choice. Your goal is to have everything contained in one spot, rather than in different places throughout the car, so it’s easy to find.

Start with first aid

Your kit should include some first aid supplies, in case someone in your car is sick or has an injury. You can buy a premade first aid kit, which will include the most commonly used supplies, at a store or online. Or you can assemble your own in a large zip-top plastic bag or canvas pouch. It should include band-aids, gauze pads, medical tape, antibiotic ointment, rash creams, pain medicine like acetaminophen or ibuprofen, antihistamines for allergies, sunscreen, cotton balls and swabs, saline solution, and a thermometer. You might already have extras of some of these things at home. Ask an adult to help you look, and then purchase what you still need at a grocery or drugstore.

Pack other essentials

Other helpful things to include are an extra car phone charger or battery pack, a flashlight with spare batteries, food items that don’t spoil (like protein bars or crackers, but be sure to switch them out every six months), and bottles of drinking water. Finally, think about what you might need in bad weather and add those items, such as plastic rain ponchos, blankets, spare hats and gloves, and an ice scraper.