

Traffic Signals

Fact Sheet 4.3
Content Information

Traffic Signals

Traffic signals are lights that tell drivers when or where they should stop and go and who should be given the right-of-way. Traffic lights are usually at intersections and are always in the same order, red, yellow and green from top to bottom to assist drivers who may be color blind or whose view may be partially blocked. It is important that drivers understand the meaning of each color and symbol, and respond correctly. Traffic control can also be provided by law enforcement, highway personnel or school crossing guards in special situations. Drivers must obey directions from these persons.

- **Steady RED** indicates moving traffic shall stop prior to the stop line, pedestrian crosswalk, or roadway edge line and remain stopped as long as the signal is red. When turning right at an intersection, if there is no sign prohibiting a right turn on a red light, drivers may turn after stopping and checking for traffic and pedestrians. Some states allow a left turn on red in certain situations. Check your state law on this maneuver.
- **Steady YELLOW** indicates the traffic light is about to change to red. Drivers should slow down and come to a complete stop, if safe to do so and if traffic flow to the rear allows. If drivers are in the intersection or too close to stop safely when the yellow light comes on, they may continue safely through the intersection.
- **Steady GREEN** indicates traffic shall go through the intersection if it is clear to do so. Drivers must yield to emergency vehicles and other roadway users as required by law. Drivers may turn left at a green light, but only when the intersection is clear. Drivers must yield to oncoming traffic and pedestrians before turning.
- **Flashing RED** indicates traffic shall stop before entering the intersection and use the same procedure as a driver would at a stop sign by yielding to other vehicles and pedestrians before proceeding.
- **Flashing YELLOW** indicates a need to slow down and proceed with caution.
- **RED arrow** indicates traffic direction. Drivers may not go in the direction of the arrow.
- **YELLOW arrow** indicates the green arrow is ending and drivers should be prepared to stop for any traffic. Sometimes a left turn light will display a yellow flashing arrow. Drivers may proceed into the left turn without stopping but must yield to oncoming traffic if present.
- **GREEN arrow** indicates drivers can safely turn in the direction of the arrow if the intersection is clear. When the arrow is green, oncoming or crossing traffic should have a red light and yield to the driver's turning action.



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Pedestrian Signals

Drivers must yield to pedestrians at all times. Even if they are not in a crosswalk. At intersections drivers may find pedestrian signals, which indicate when it is safe for pedestrians to cross. Drivers may also find signs at mid-block crosswalks, which require drivers to yield as they would at an intersection.

- **Countdown timers** indicate how much time is left for pedestrians to cross the street and many emit audible beeps to correspond with the countdown.
- **“Walk” signal** means pedestrians may proceed across the street.
- **Flashing “don’t walk” signal** means pedestrians already in the street may continue walking across the street, others should not start.
- **Steady “don’t walk” signal** means pedestrians should not enter the street, unless traffic is clear. In some states pedestrians may walk on the “don’t walk” signal provided the traffic is clear. All drivers should be alert to pedestrians at all times.

