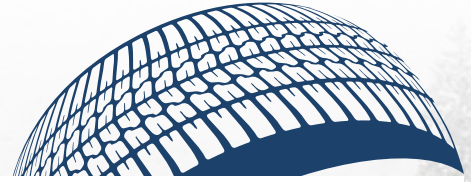


Winter tires

*Within Europe, in Iceland
and Norway*



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Help and advice
for consumers
in Europe



European Consumer Centre France

INTRODUCTION

In most of the EU countries winter tires for cars are not mandatory, but there are exceptions... Before going on holidays, it could be useful to get an overview of the situation in each European country, in Iceland and Norway. 28 ECCs answered the following questions:

- are winter tires mandatory or not?
- if not are there special areas (or caution signs on the road) where you need winter tires?
- are studded tires allowed?

COUNTRIES WHERE THE WINTER TIRES ARE LEGALLY MANDATORY

Estonia

Winter tires are mandatory in Estonia from December 1st to March 1st. With exceptional road- and weather conditions it's allowed to use studded tires from 15th of October to 31st of March. Winter tires without studs (all-season tires) are allowed to use all year around.

Finland

In Finland winter tires are compulsory from 1st December to the end of February. Spiked tires may be used from 1st November until the first Monday after Easter. The tread depth has to be at least 3 mm. These regulations also apply to cars which have been registered abroad.

Latvia

In Latvia within the period from 1st December to 1st March all vehicles shall be fitted with tires, which are suitable for driving in winter conditions. Within the period from 1st May to 1st October it is forbidden to use vehicles with studded tires. In addition winter tires should have at least 4 mm tread depth.

Lithuania

Winter tires are mandatory between 10th November - 1st April. Consumers can use universal tires. Studded tires are not allowed between 10th April until 1st November. According to Lithuanian rules tire's tread depth should be not less than 3 mm to be considered a suitable tire for winter season.

Slovenia

From 15th November to 15th March and beyond these dates, during winter weather conditions (e.g. during snowfalls, black ice, etc.) private cars and vehicles up to 3.5 t must have winter equipment as follows:

- winter tires on all four wheels or
- summer tires on all four wheels + snow chains in car boot

In both cases, the minimum tire tread depth must be 3 mm. Vehicles over 3.5 t must have winter tires at least on the driving wheels or summer tires on all four wheels + snow chains in car boot. Exception: at the seaside region sufficient winter equipment are summer tires with the minimum tire tread depth 3 mm (no need to have chains in car boot). But during winter weather conditions (e.g. during snowfalls, black ice, etc.) snow chains have to be mounted on drive wheels. This regulation applies also to vehicles with foreign registration plates but only during winter weather conditions.

Sweden

Between December 1st and March 31st it is mandatory to have winter tires or equal equipment. During the mandatory period the tread depth must be at least 3mm. These rules also apply to foreign cars traveling through Sweden.

Any trailer attached to a vehicle needs to follow the rules regarding winter tires.

If the vehicle has studded tires then so must the trailer. If the vehicle uses friction tires it's ok to use friction tires or studded tires.

In Sweden studded tires is allowed between October 1st and April 15th or if winter road conditions apply or is expected.

As from 1st January 2013, heavy trucks, heavy buses and private cars class II (campers) with a total weight of more than 3.5 metric tons, are to have winter tires or equivalent equipment on the vehicle's driven wheels when there are wintry conditions on the roads during the period from 1st December to 31st March. The depth of the tire tread of all tires on heavy vehicles is to be at least 5 millimeters during wintry road conditions. This requirement does not apply to attached trailers.

COUNTRIES WHERE THE WINTER TIRES ARE LEGALLY MANDATORY

For more information (in English) check out the [Swedish Transport Agency website](#) where you can find e.g. the definition of winter road, the definition of winter tires, rules regarding lorries and trucks etc.

Croatia

Winter tires and additional winter equipment are mandatory during the time period **between 15 November current year and 14 April** the following year.

The mandatory use of winter equipment refers to all types of motor vehicles regardless of the weather and road conditions, except for vehicles of Croatian Armed Forces

As to obligatory winter equipment during that period, vehicles with a maximum mass up to 3.5 t must contain as follows:

- 4 winter tires (M + S) or
- 4 summer tires with a minimum tread depth of 4 mm
- and snow chains in car trunk

Obligatory winter equipment for buses contains the following:

- snow chains on drive wheels
- winter tires (M + S) on drive wheels.

Buses and trucks, which for technical reasons can not be equipped with snow chains on drive wheels, must have winter tires (M + S) on drive wheels.

In the case of non-compliance with the mandatory rules during the winter conditions, drivers will be fined in the amount of 700 kuna (approx. 106 €).



COUNTRIES WHERE THE WINTER TIRES ARE MANDATORY IF WEATHER CONDITIONS SO REQUIRE

Germany

Drivers must adapt the type of tires to the weather conditions. Since 2010 winter tires are mandatory in case of black ice, packed snow, slush, glaze, slippery frost. Winter tires are usually marked with M + S (Mud and snow). All-year-round tires with M + S symbol or tires with three peak mountain snowflake usually comply to the regulation.

Winter tires must have at least 1,6 mm tread depth. They have to be installed on all 4 wheels. For motorbikes winter tires are mandatory, too.

On the contrary, summer tires are allowed if weather conditions are milder than normally and shall stay like this during the day.

The regulation doesn't indicate a minimal temperature or a determined period when the vehicles shall be fitted with winter tires. German authorities want to avoid risks due to an equipment of vehicles inappropriate to winter weather conditions, which hinder/impede the road traffic and can cause accidents. If you are in breach of the law, drivers can be fined (from 60 up to 120 € and 1 point in the German driving ability register FAER) depending on the type of the offence. In case of an accident (caused by a third person or by your fault) during winter time, the consumer might encounter problems with his insurance company in case he did not use appropriate tires.

Studded tires are not allowed as they could cause damage to the pavement.

Austria

Winter tires

In Austria from 1st November to 15th April, vehicles must be fitted with winter tires if weather conditions so require. These tires must be fitted on all wheels when roads are covered in snow or ice. The tires must bear one of the usual marks as M+S, M.S. or M&S and have a minimum tread of 4 mm for radial tires (most common tires) and a minimum tread of 5 mm for cross-ply tires. Alternately, vehicles with summer tires must have chains, see below. This regulation is only valid for private cars and goods vehicles up to 3.5 tonnes.

It is the driver's legal responsibility to carry the required winter equipment; therefore, it is essential to check that it is included in any hire car. This regulation applies to vehicles registered in Austria as well as those registered abroad.

Spiked tires

Spiked tires may be used only from 1st October to 31st May, though special local regulations may extend this period. These regulations also apply to temporarily imported vehicles. Spiked tires may be used only on vehicles with steel radial tires, of a maximum total authorized weight not exceeding 3,500 kg and a maximum axle weight not exceeding 1,800

COUNTRIES WHERE THE WINTER TIRES ARE MANDATORY IF WEATHER CONDITIONS SO REQUIRE

kg. They must be fitted on all wheels. If the towing vehicle has spiked tires, the trailer must be fitted with spiked tires on all wheels. The tire's steel pins must not stick out more than 2 mm beyond the tire's tread and must settle tightly in the tire in order to avoid damage of the road surface and of other vehicles.

Vehicles fitted with spiked tires are subject to special speed limits (80 km/h outside built-up areas, 100 km/h on motorways), and must display at the rear the approved «spiked tires» sign. This sign is available from the automobile clubs, petrol stations, etc.

Snow chains

The use of snow chains instead of winter tires is permitted if the road is continually or almost always under snow or ice. In extreme conditions the authorities can require cars to be fitted with snow chains on the driving wheels. All-wheel drive vehicles must be fitted with snow chains on at least two driving wheels of the same axle. The international road sign is used. The maximum speed recommended is 40 km/h.

You can find more information on <http://www.bmvit.gv.at/en/verkehr/roads/safety/tyres.html>

Luxembourg

As of October 1st 2012 winter tires for cars are obligatory in Luxembourg in the case of snow and ice on the road.

Norway

It is not as such obligatory to drive with winter tires in Norway, but you must always adapt the type of tires to the weather conditions. One can therefore consider that it is in fact (more or less) mandatory to drive with winter tires during the winter in Norway.

From November 1st (or October 15th in the north of Norway), drivers are allowed to drive with studded tires without being fined. And this is highly recommended. In the municipal Oslo and Bergen, all drivers with studded tires must pay environmental fees within the municipal boundaries.

Further, drivers have the duty to remove studded tires from the first Monday after the second Easter day. From 1st November 2013 it is mandatory to have winter tires on heavy vehicles (over 3500 kg) until second easter day.

Romania

In Romania winter tires are mandatory on roads covered with snow, ice or black ice. These tires must be fitted on all wheels. The tires must bear the mark M+S or M&S. Winter tires must have at least 1,6 mm tread depth on minimum two thirds of the tread width.

Studded tires are allowed, but they must be approved (homologated), on public roads covered with snow, ice or black ice.

COUNTRIES WHERE THE WINTER TIRES ARE MANDATORY IF WEATHER CONDITIONS SO REQUIRE

Slovakia

If weather conditions so require, winter tires are mandatory for vehicles ($m < 3.5$ tons). Weather conditions so require when roads are covered with coherent layer of snow, ice or frost.

Winter tires are legally mandatory for trucks ($m \geq 3.5$ tons) and buses (at least one of the driving axle has to be fitted with winter tires) from 15 November to 31 March and if weather conditions so require.

Czech Republic

From 1st November to 31st March, vehicles must be fitted with winter tires if there is a consistent layer of snow, ice or icing on the road or if with regard to weather conditions it can be assumed that such layer can occur on the road during drive. Studded tires are not allowed. The tread depth to be considered a winter tire is min. 4 mm; at vehicles weighing more than 3,500 kg tread depth is 6 mm.

COUNTRIES WHERE THE WINTER TIRES ARE MANDATORY ONLY IF THERE IS A SPECIFIC ROAD SIGN

Spain

Generally, winter tires are not mandatory in Spain.

It is mandatory only when there is a specific public authority order or a specific road sign (in the mountains areas).

Studded tires are allowed. This kind of tires is considered as winter tires.

Italy

Winter tires are generally not mandatory in Italy, but if there is a specific road sign (decided by a special decree), the vehicle has to be equipped with snow chains or winter tires during the period shown on the road sign.

France

Winter tires or snow chains are generally not mandatory but if there is a specific road sign (decided by a special decree), they are mandatory.



COUNTRIES WHERE THE WINTER TIRES ARE NOT MANDATORY

Belgium

Bulgaria

Cyprus

Greece

Hungary

In certain areas (highlighted with signs) the use of snow chains can be mandatory on at least drive axle. The use of studded tires on public roads is prohibited.

Malta

Portugal

The snow chains are not mandatory excepting when required by a specific traffic signal.

Netherlands

In the Netherlands winter tires for cars are not mandatory. Dutch consumers do purchase the winter tires because many Dutch people will go on winter holiday to France, Germany and Austria. Therefore they have to apply the rules of those countries and buy winter tires. The ANWB Royal Dutch Touring Club (branch organization) informs the consumer on their website which rules apply for what country concerning the winter tires.

The use of studded tires is not allowed in the Netherlands, because it damages the pavement.

Denmark

Winter tires are not mandatory. Studded tires are allowed from 1st November to 15th April.

Ireland

Winter tires are not mandatory in Ireland. Studded tires are not illegal. However, studded tires should only be used in Ireland on compacted snow or ice. If a person is found using the tires on asphalt they can be prosecuted for causing damage to the road surface, which is prohibited under the Irish Road Traffic Regulations.

Iceland

Winter tires are not strictly mandatory in Iceland for any period. But according to a new regulation tires must have at least 3 mm thread depth over the winter period (1st of November to 14th of April).

Studs are allowed part of the year but there has been some discussion in the last few years about forbidding or limiting their use in the city/the Southwest area, both to limit damage to roads and therefore costs, and the environmental and health impact of the airborne particles.

Snow chains are forbidden in conditions where they can cause damage to roads.

Poland

Winter tires are not required by law but it is highly recommended to use winter tires or universal tires during winter period due to the severe winters.

Generally chains are permitted, in certain designated places chain are mandatory. Places where chains are mandatory, precede signs which

COUNTRIES WHERE THE WINTER TIRES ARE NOT MANDATORY

warn drivers that snow chains are necessary. These may only be used in case there is ice or snow covering the roads.

The use of snow chains requires sign C-18 (circular blue background with the wheel, «dressed» in the chain). This order is dismissed with the sign C-19 (similar to the sign C-18 with a warrant, except that it is crossed with the red line). It is required to use snow chains on at least two wheels of motor vehicles.

The studded tires are strictly forbidden in Poland. They may be used only during the winter sports events like rallies and races.

United Kingdom

Winter tires are not mandatory, but are permitted. Snow chains are allowed, as are studded tires. Snow socks are also permitted. Further guidelines are below, as outlined in a recent independent audit commissioned by the UK government.

The subject of suitable tyres for vehicles in severe winter weather has been raised by the UK media and the public in response to problems experienced on the roads. The audit, in December 2010, called The Resilience of England's Transport Systems said that tyres should not be used if they could in any way damage the surface of the road. The audit gave four options for vehicles to change their tyres in winter conditions:

Winter tires. These operate best at temperatures below 7°C and wear may be higher than standard tires if used in warmer conditions. They are made of a softer rubber compound which retains its flexibility in cold weather, and the tread pattern is also optimised. This may include having more “biting” edges to give better grip and wider gaps to help performance in snow.

Studded tires. These are for use in extreme conditions such as thick snow and deep ice. They should be removed when conditions improve as

they are likely to damage the road if in direct contact.

Snow chains. These can be used if snow or ice is encountered during a journey provided they are removed when conditions improve since, as with studded tires, they are likely to damage the road.

Snow socks. A textile fabric is placed around the tire to improve grip on snow and ice. They tend to be easier to fit than snow chains but may not be as effective in all conditions. They are also less likely to damage the road, but should still be removed when conditions improve as they will wear rapidly and will not perform as well in normal conditions.

Any decision for a motorist to change their tires will depend upon driving conditions and types of journeys undertaken, so motorists who expect to drive in areas where conditions are persistently cold or where snow and ice is present for long periods may find it helpful to change their tyres in the winter.

The Department for Transport advises that it does not believe there is a strong case for legislation requiring winter tires to be fitted, but consumers can still choose to fit them. Their view is that typically motorists in England will find that the standard tires fitted to their vehicle have a tread pattern and tire compound that ensures good performance in a wide range of conditions and they can be used throughout the year. Issues such as the costs of purchasing, storing and changing tires at set times each year would need to be balanced against the possible benefits, and that many vehicles in the south of the country would only experience the necessary conditions to gain from these tires on a few occasions each year.

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