

Fowl Play:

Tailgating Trouble Takes Flight

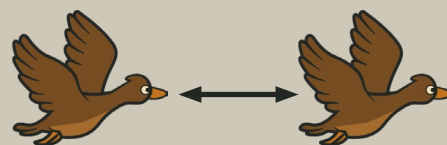
Ever see a flock of birds bump into each other mid-air?

Ever see a school of fish, swimming in perfect synergy, suddenly bump into each other?

Or a herd of migrating animals crashing into one another?

The answer is no.

That is because in the natural world, animals have evolved remarkable spatial awareness and coordination skills that help them navigate, avoid collisions and maintain personal space². Animals rely on sensory cues and simple interaction rules to move together safely¹⁵.



Inspired by nature, our campaign "Tailgating Isn't Natural" draws on nature to highlight how driving too close to other vehicles breaks the instinct we share with animals. When we're behind the wheel, our natural instinct to respect space and distance is inhibited.

NRSP's deep dive into tailgating—so you don't have to

In 2024, the National Road Safety Partnership Program conducted a survey to gather insights from workers and managers across our industry partners about their attitudes and experiences related to tailgating. Our next series of fact sheets will delve into findings from our survey and address concerns and potential solutions.

Outside the vehicle



Inside the vehicle



Survey Results

According to our survey, most drivers support the recommended following distance under ideal conditions:

- 80% of heavy vehicle drivers
- 88% of light vehicle workplace drivers
- 87% of non-workplace light vehicle drivers

These drivers agree that the 2–3 second rule is appropriate.

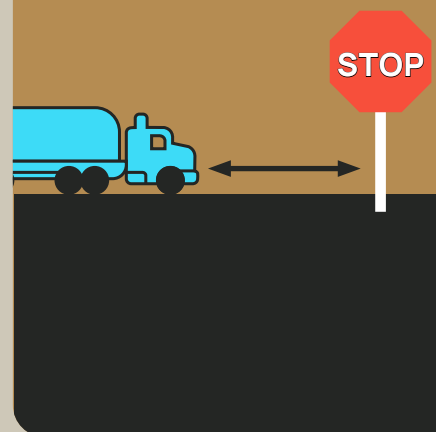
While these numbers are encouraging, we could always aim higher.

Maintaining the correct following distances is a fundamental safety rule taught during driving school and should stay with us throughout our driving lives.

Drivers underestimate safe following gaps

Although most drivers agree with the recommended two to four second rule, **the survey reveals what they believe they should do rather than what they actually do.** Many respondents indicate they should leave a two to three second gap even in poor conditions. This suggests that they may underestimate the extra space needed when visibility and traction is reduced. Some heavy vehicle drivers report they should leave just four seconds in wet conditions, which is the minimum recommended for light vehicles. Heavy vehicles require longer stopping distances due to their mass and longer stopping distances.

**Heavy vehicles
require longer
stopping distances.**



This highlights a disconnect between perceived safe practice and likely on-road behaviour and suggests that drivers may overestimate their following distance.

The survey asked drivers how they measure following distance, offering several options. Nearly half (49.2%) of heavy vehicle drivers and 38.6% of light vehicle drivers reported relying on visual estimation. While some used time-based methods (e.g., counting seconds) or allowed vehicle systems to determine the gap, the high proportion estimating by eye suggests that many drivers still depend on subjective judgment rather than measurable or technological methods.

 **49.2%**



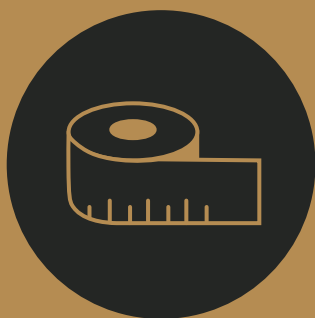
 **38.6%**



Wet Weather Driving

Different conditions require different following distances. In wet weather, it is recommended to extend the distance to four seconds ¹⁶, which most light vehicle drivers seem to understand. On the other hand, **21.3% of heavy vehicle drivers claim that a 10-second gap is required. 14.6% believe that a 4 second gap is sufficient, which is the bare minimum even in ideal conditions.**

According to studies, factors such as size, load and regulations influence whether a truck engages in high risk behaviours ¹⁴. This is likely the reason why there is a range of different responses about this issue.



Size



Load

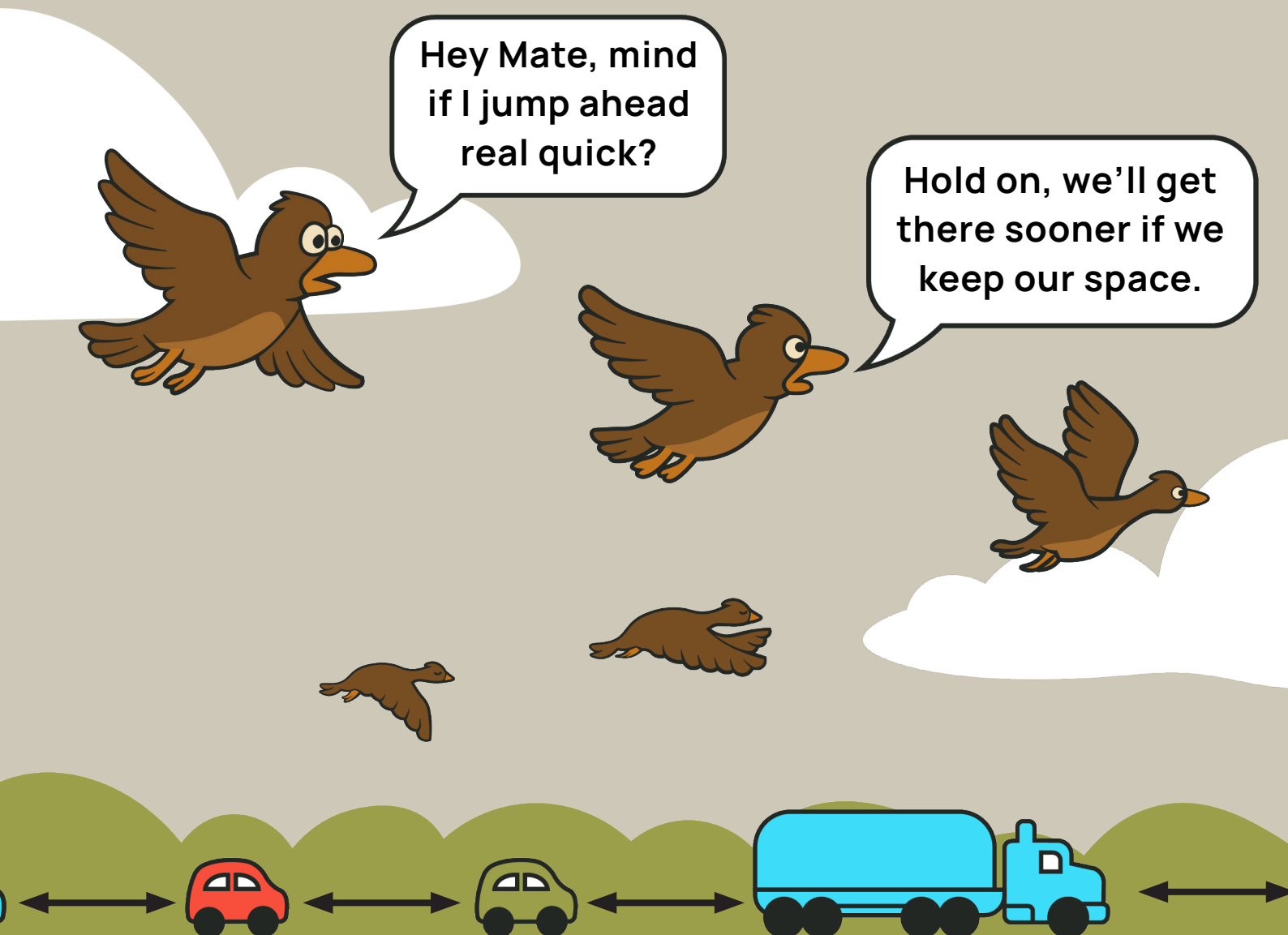


Regulations

Night Time Wet Weather Driving

When it came to driving in risky conditions such as wet weather and at night, responses varied widely, ranging from 5 to 8 seconds. This variation suggests uncertainty among drivers about how much extra distance is truly needed in these high-risk situations. However, the generally higher responses are a positive sign, as there is no set following distance specified for night-time, wet weather driving. Drivers are encouraged to increase their following distance beyond 4 seconds if they feel uncomfortable with the following distance. Drivers should be encouraged to feel confident in allowing more than the recommended following distance when needed, as the guidelines are intended to represent the minimum safe gap.





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Let's start being more mindful of our following distances, just like animals instinctively are, starting today.