

## What are the legal speed limits?

Iowa's speed regulations are based on the same basic speed law used in all 50 states: "Any person driving a motor vehicle on a highway shall drive the same at a careful and prudent speed not greater than nor less than is reasonable and proper, having due regard to the traffic, surface, and width of the highway and of any other conditions then existing, and no person shall drive any vehicle upon a highway at a speed greater than will permit the person to bring it to a stop within the assured clear distance ahead, such driver having the right to assume, however, that all persons using said highway will observe the law." (Iowa Code, Section 321.285)

Statutory speed limits are based on the concept that uniform categories of highways can be traveled safely at certain preset maximum speeds under ideal conditions. Whether the speed limit is posted or unposted, drivers should reduce their speed in poor weather, heavy traffic, and under other potentially hazardous conditions.

### Most common statutory speed limits in Iowa

Speed Limit	Location
20 mph	in business districts
25 mph	in residential and school districts
45 mph	in suburban districts
55 mph	on rural highways
65 mph	on selected multilane highways
70 mph	on rural interstate highways

If it's determined that a statutory speed limit is not the appropriate speed limit for a specific section of highway, the Iowa DOT may set a higher or lower regulatory speed limit. (Iowa Code, section 321.290)

## How is a regulatory speed limit set?

The Iowa DOT establishes regulatory speed limits on state and federal highways based on an engineering and traffic investigation.

### Some or all of these factors may be considered in the investigation:

- **Area context** (such as urban downtown, rural town, or suburban)
- **Road environment** (such as number and type of driveways, parking practices, and pedestrian and bicycle facilities)
- **Road characteristics** (such as lane widths, paved shoulders, curves, median type, traffic signals, and sight distance)
- **Crash history**
- **Traffic speeds**

When choosing a speed, drivers take many of these same factors into consideration. Therefore, the speed that most drivers consider prudent is an important value. Traffic speeds are collected at selected locations on the roadway under ideal driving conditions. The results are analyzed to determine the speed that most drivers are traveling at or below. Experience has shown that a posted speed limit near this value is the maximum safe and reasonable speed. Studies have shown that traveling much faster or slower than this value can increase the chances of being in a crash.

Engineering judgment is also an important tool. Iowa DOT engineers use knowledge of nationally accepted engineering and safety principles, combined with experience, to assign a speed limit

## What are the types of speed signs?



### Regulatory Speed Limit Sign

This black and white sign shows the maximum speed that a motorist may travel under ideal conditions. It must be authorized by the Iowa DOT for state and federal highways.

### Advisory Speed Sign

This black and yellow sign is used with a warning sign to advise motorists of a comfortable speed to navigate certain roadway conditions. For instance, on a winding road, an advisory speed sign may be used with a curve warning sign.



### Advisory Speed Sign - Construction

This black and orange sign is used with a construction warning sign to advise motorists of a comfortable speed to navigate certain roadway conditions within a work zone. For instance, in an area with rough pavement, an advisory speed sign may be used with a bump warning sign.

## What are the special types of speed zones?



### School Zones

A regulatory school speed limit may be in effect on certain days and during certain times, such as weekdays before and after school. The school plaque is black and yellow-green, and the other signs are black and white. School speed limits are typically 10-mph lower than the posted speed limit.

### Work Zones

A regulatory work zone speed limit may be posted due to roadway or traffic conditions within a work zone, considering the safety of workers within the zone and of motorists traveling through the zone. Work zone speed limits typically range from 25 mph to 65 mph.



**DOUBLE FINES** will be imposed for violations of regulatory speed limits in work zones.

**Will lowering the speed limit reduce speeds?**

Unlikely. Studies show there is little change in speed patterns after posting a reduced speed limit. Drivers are influenced most by the roadway environment.

**Will lowering the speed limit reduce crash frequency?**

Again, unlikely. Although lowering the speed limit is often seen as a solution to preventing crashes, this is not necessarily the case. Crashes are most often the result of driver inattention and driver error. However, if a posted speed limit is unrealistically low, it can create a greater speed variance (i.e. some drivers follow the speed limit, while most drive at a higher speed that seems reasonable to them). This speed variance can lead to tailgating, unsafe passing, and ultimately to more crashes.

**Why do we even have speed limits?**

Uniform vehicle speeds in a traffic flow results in the safest operation. Posted speed limits can keep traffic flowing smoothly, as long as most drivers find the speed limits reasonable. To best do this, speed limits should be consistently set throughout the state.

Reasonable speed limits also give motorists an idea of a safe speed to drive in an unfamiliar location.

Reasonable speed limits are used by police officials to identify excessive speeds and to curb unsafe behavior.

**Who should I contact for speed limit concerns?**

If you believe that there is a safety concern or an inappropriate speed limit posted, you may reach out to the party responsible for maintaining the roadway.

**State and federal highways**

The state and federal highway system includes:



Interstates



U.S. Highways



State Highways

For regulatory and advisory speed limits on the state and federal highway system, contact the Iowa DOT district office nearest you at the number below or by visiting:

<https://iowadot.gov/districts>

- District 1 (Ames): 515-239-1635
- District 2 (Mason City): 641-423-7584
- District 3 (Sioux City): 712-276-1451
- District 4 (Council Bluffs): 712-243-3355
- District 5 (Fairfield): 641-472-4171
- District 6 (Cedar Rapids): 319-364-0235

**City streets**

For regulatory and advisory speed limits on city streets, contact the appropriate city office.

**County roads**

For regulatory and advisory speed limits on county roads, contact the appropriate county engineer's office.

**Remember to always use good judgment and drive at a safe and reasonable speed for the existing conditions.**

**This is every driver's responsibility.**



Traffic and Safety Bureau

800 Lincoln Way

Ames, IA 50010

Iowa DOT ensures nondiscrimination and equal employment in all programs and activities in accordance with Title VI and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other nondiscrimination statutes. If you need more information or special assistance for persons with disabilities or limited English proficiency, contact Iowa DOT Civil Rights at 515-239-1111 or by email at [civilrights@iowadot.us](mailto:civilrights@iowadot.us).

# IOWA SPEED LIMITS

Getting you up to speed  
on speed limits in Iowa

