

Driver Safety Letter

presented by



Back to School August 2017



As summer comes to a close, children of all ages begin returning to school. Whether they are driving on the interstates, walking on the side of the road, or waiting for school buses, expect to see a lot more people on the roads and a lot more erratic driving behavior.

According to a report by the National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration (NHTSA), autumn is the most dangerous time of year for pedestrians, with 29% of pedestrian-related fatalities. In fact, pedestrian-vehicle injuries are a leading cause of death for children ages 5-14. With more people heading back to work and back to school, the coming weeks usher in different driving patterns of which we must be aware. It is important to be particularly alert in school zones, crosswalks, bus stops, ball fields and play grounds. Following are some “refresher tips” to keep in mind:

- Plan your trips to give yourself a little extra time to handle the increased congestion that may occur during school hours, particularly around school zones. This will help ease potential frustration and keep you focused on your task at hand.
- Be familiar with school zones. Get in the habit of noticing where school zones and crosswalks are on routes that you normally take.
- Stop for school bus lights. Always stop for school buses with flashing red lights. Drivers approaching the bus must come to a complete stop for the duration that the red lights are on. Some school buses have flashing yellow lights, which mean that drivers may proceed with extreme caution. Bus drivers often use the flashing yellow lights before the flashing red lights, signaling that they are about to stop.
- Obey crossing guards. School crossing guards are given police training and have the same authority as local traffic police in most areas. Disobeying a crossing guard could result in serious trouble. Keep in mind that driving on major streets where crossing guards and crosswalks are observed is safer than taking the "short-cut," side streets where children may be unattended.
- Anticipate the worst. The speed and distance of oncoming cars is more difficult for young children to judge. Slow down and always anticipate the chance that a small child may run in front of you.
- Be careful around parked vehicles, especially those parked on the side of the road. Children waiting to cross may be especially difficult to see in these situations.
- Turn your headlights on. Drive with headlights on in areas with children and pedestrians. The AAA says that the use of headlights can reduce pedestrian accidents by about 25%.
- Avoid using cell phones when driving. Cell phones are a known distraction. Never use hand-held cell phones while driving, and never use hands-free cell phones while driving in school zones or areas with children. The same goes for activities that distract you, such as looking at notes and reading maps.
- Avoid reversing. Try to avoid reversing your vehicle in areas with children. It is more difficult to see short children and attend to your vehicle's blind spots while reversing.
- Don't speed. Remember that the speed limit in most school zones during school times or when children are present is 25 MPH. Bad weather, or areas with limited visibility, will require a lower speed. Your visibility to pedestrians, your ability to see them and your stopping distance all may be greatly impaired by weather or road conditions so follow common sense and slow down.
- Don't honk at pedestrians or bicyclists. Honking at a child, whether on foot or on a bicycle, is generally not a good idea. The noise could possibly cause the startled child to trip or fall and be in a dangerous position for other approaching traffic.

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