

Safety Bulletin

8 Tips to Stay Safe During “Back-to-School” Season

Back-to-school season isn't just for children. When the school year begins, there are more cars on the road, more pedestrians and bicyclists to watch for, and a higher risk for accidents. That means it's time to take extra caution on your routes.

According to the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA), 327 school-age children died in school-transportation-related crashes between 2004 and 2013. Of those deaths, 201 were in vehicle accidents; another 116 were pedestrians, and nine were cyclists.

Follow these eight tips to keep children (and yourself) safe during the school year:

- 1. Watch the clock (and the calendar)** – According to NHTSA, school travel most often happens from September 1 through June 15. Peak school travel hours are between 6-9 a.m. and again from 2-5 p.m.
- 2. Look for those flashing lights.** All 50 states have laws requiring drivers to stop for a stopped school bus. In many states, buses have yellow lights, which means you must be prepared to stop. Once those lights turn red (often accompanied by an extended stop sign), you must stop. You must remain stopped until the lights are off, the stop sign is withdrawn, and the bus begins moving again. Some buses are now outfitted with cameras that capture drivers who pass illegally.
- 3. Keep your distance.** Studies show children are in most danger of being hit by a vehicle within 10 feet of the school bus. Be sure to stop far enough away to allow children to walk to and from the bus.
- 4. Obey crossing guards.** When a stop sign is displayed, motorists are required to stop. If you see a crossing guard holding a stop sign in a crosswalk, be sure to stop well before the crosswalk to give kids the appropriate room to cross the street safely.
- 5. Know your school zones.** Many are marked with flashing yellow lights, have speed limits of 20 mph or less, and are active during pick-up and drop-off times. Even if the school zone appears clear, obey the traffic laws in the zone for everyone's safety.
- 6. Know the neighborhood.** Even if you're not in a school zone, you might encounter children walking or bicycling to school on roads you travel often. Slow down and watch for children at all times.
- 7. Plan ahead.** Know the school zones on your route and what time you may encounter them. That way you'll be prepared for any slowdowns. Also, when possible, look for alternate routes that don't include school zones.
- 8. Expect the unexpected.** Children do not easily estimate the speed of an oncoming vehicle, nor do they always cross safely at a crosswalk. Being alert can save a life.

