

## School Zone Safety

### Understanding the hazards

Over the next several weeks, millions of children will be starting a new school year. As kids head back to the classroom, it is important to understand the hazards you may face when sharing the road with children and school buses.

### What is a school zone?

A school zone is a section of roadway near a school or school crosswalk where signs provide notice that a school is nearby and children may be present.



In a school zone, the posted speed limit is greatly reduced. This provides drivers more time to react to unexpected actions by children within the school zone.

When driving through a school zone and in the area surrounding a school, your undivided attention needs to be on the road, looking out for potential hazards.

### Facts and figures

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) defines a child as a person who is 14 years old or younger. A pedestrian is defined as anyone on foot, walking, running, jogging, hiking, sitting, or laying down.

According to NHTSA data for 2013, five percent of all pedestrian traffic fatalities (236) were children.

One-fifth (21 percent) of all child traffic fatalities were pedestrians.

Twenty-six percent of child pedestrian traffic fatalities occurred between 3 p.m. and 5:59 p.m.

### Pay attention/drive defensively

The best way to prevent an accident is by being alert, paying attention, and following defensive driving practices when driving in a school zone. This includes:

- Continually scanning the road,
- Slowing down, especially in school zones and surrounding areas,
- Obeying traffic laws and speed limits,
- Obeying the signals of crossing guards,
- Watching for children walking or biking near a school,
- Watching for children gathering near bus stops,
- Preparing to stop for a school bus when its yellow lights are flashing,
- Stopping for a school bus when its red lights are flashing, and
- Expecting the unexpected.



## School bus safety

According to statistics provided by NHTSA, between 2003 and 2012, there have been 1,353 people killed in school-transportation-related crashes. That is an average of 135 deaths per year.

Occupants of school transportation vehicles accounted for 8 percent of the fatalities, non-occupants (pedestrians, bicyclists) accounted for 21 percent of the fatalities.

Occupants of other vehicles involved accounted for the majority of fatalities (71 percent).

Between 2003 and 2012, 119 school-age pedestrians (younger than 19 years old) have died in school-transportation-related crashes. Over one-quarter (30 percent) were struck by other vehicles (cars, light trucks, vans, large trucks) involved in the crashes.



There are several factors that cause younger children to be at greater risk of being involved in an accident. Younger children are smaller and more difficult to see, as the driver's view of them may be blocked by a school bus or other large vehicle.

Younger children can be impulsive and may cross a road or street without warning. Also, they have a more difficult time judging vehicle speed.

Younger children may not fully understand the dangers posed by moving vehicles and may expect vehicles to stop for them when their school bus stops.

## Know the flashing light system

School bus drivers use the "flashing signal light system" to alert motorists of pending actions.

Yellow flashing lights indicate that the bus is preparing to stop to load or unload children. Drivers must slow down and prepare to stop their vehicles.

Red flashing lights and an extended stop arm indicate that the bus has stopped and that children are getting on or off the bus. Drivers must stop and wait until:

- The red lights stop flashing,
- The stop arm is withdrawn, and
- The bus begins to move.

## School bus laws

All states have laws in place to protect children as they board and exit school buses. Though specifics vary from state-to-state, there are standard rules that apply everywhere.

Never pass a school bus when its lights are flashing and its stop arm is extended. This means children are boarding or exiting the bus.

Never pass a school bus on the right side. This is where children enter and exit the bus.

In many states, school bus drivers can report illegally passing vehicles. The illegal action does not need to be observed by law enforcement for a driver to be cited.



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