

COVID-19 Safety Tip - don't let your guard down

Back to School Safety Tips for Motorists and Kids

Just as the summer is starting to really heat up in Texas, it is time for children to go back to school. This year with COVID-19, going back to school will look a bit different. For those children who will be going back to in-person classes, it will be important to take precautions to make sure each trip is a safe one. Whether going to school as a pedestrian, bicyclist, bus rider, vehicle passenger or a new driver, follow safety guidelines to avoid injuries. Drivers also need to be vigilant because school children can be very unpredictable. They are easily distracted and can often run into traffic or out from behind parked cars. Looking out for children, rather than expecting them to look out for vehicles, is the best defense for drivers.

Although school buses are considered the safest mode of transportation to school, social distancing may reduce the number of children that can ride on busses and increase the number of pedestrians, bicyclists, and private vehicle commuters to school each day. Children may also be walking in single file instead of larger groups which may make it more difficult to notice them when they are crossing streets.

In 2018, according to the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), there were 765 traffic crashes in Texas school zones, resulting in 1 death and 15 serious injuries. The most common causes for these crashes were failure to control speed, driver inattention, and failure to yield the right of way. In addition, last year there were 2,357 traffic crashes involving school buses in Texas, which resulted in 5 fatalities and 42 serious injuries. Speed and driver inattention also were the top factors in those crashes.

Whether it is a parents' old-

est just starting kindergarten, or they're taking that first trip to school in his or her own car, parents can play an important role in keeping their children safe. For young chil-

dren, make sure they know the rules about school bus safety when it comes to boarding and getting off the bus. If transporting children to school, remember that children under 13 should always ride in the back seat in a car seat (including a booster), or seat belt, depending on whether they fit properly in the seat belt.

Teen drivers and their parents should be aware of the Texas Graduated Driver License Law and the restrictions it puts in place, including no cell phone use and no more than one passenger under 21 in the vehicle unless the passenger is related to the driver. And, most importantly, always stress buckling up on every trip - even on those short trips to and from school!

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension-Rusk County reminds drivers and children to follow these safety tips from TxDOT to avoid needless tragedies.

Tips for Children Walking or Biking to School

* Always walk on sidewalks whenever they're available.

* Cross the street at intersections or marked crosswalks. Look left, right, and left again before proceeding.

* Always obey crossing guards.

* Make eye contact with drivers before crossing the street. Never assume a driver sees you.



**LIZ
BUCKNER**
Extension Agent

" Look for traffic when stepping off a bus or from behind parked cars.

* Always wear a helmet when riding a bicycle.

* Don't be distracted by electronic devices that take your eyes and ears off the road.

* Follow all traffic rules, signs, and signals.

Tips for Driving in School Zones

* Stay alert and put your phone away. Using a handheld electronic device while driving in an active school zone is against the law.

* Always obey school zone speed limit signs. Remember: Traffic fines usually double in school zones.

* Drop off and pick up your children in your school's designated areas, not the middle of the street.

* Keep an eye on children gathered at bus stops.

* Watch for children who might dart across the street or between vehicles.

Tips for Drivers Sharing the Road with School Buses

* Never tailgate. Follow at a safe distance, keeping in mind that school buses make frequent stops.

* Stop for flashing red lights or a stop sign on a school bus, regardless of which direction you're headed. Continue your trip once the bus has moved, the flashing lights stop flashing, or the bus driver signals it's OK to pass.

* Violations can lead to a fine up to \$1,250 for a first offense.

Motorists can make a big difference by remembering to drive with extra caution when driving in and around school zones. Driving at slower speeds and paying extra attention may very well save a life!