SCHOOL BUS SAFETY

The Safest Mode of Transportation for Children

In Minnesota, school buses make at least 10,000 school bus trips daily. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, school buses are the safest mode of transportation for children — children are eight times safer riding in a bus to school than any other vehicles.

In the past five years, there were 533 school bus crashes in Minnesota, resulting in seven deaths (none of which were student bus occupants) and 211 injuries (of which 65 were student bus occupants).

Danger in the "Danger Zone"

More children are killed outside of a school bus than they are as bus occupants. Motorists must anticipate children in a school bus “danger zone” — the area around a bus where most injuries and deaths occur.

School Bus Safety Tips for Children

When waiting for the bus: Be patient, stand back from road and no running or rowdy behavior.

When on the bus: stay seated, listen to the driver and use quiet voices.

It's important for parents to discuss and demonstrate pedestrian safety with their children and reinforce safe crossing after exiting a bus:

- When getting off a bus, look to be sure no cars are passing on the shoulder (side of the road).
- Before crossing the street, take five “giant steps” out from the front of the bus, or until the driver’s face can be seen.
- Wait for the driver to signal that it’s safe to cross.
- Look left-right-left when coming to the edge of the bus to make sure traffic is stopped. Keep watching traffic when crossing.

School Bus Safety Tips for Motorists

- Motorists must stop at least 20 feet from a school bus that is displaying red flashing lights and/or its stop arm is extended when approaching from the rear and from the opposite direction on undivided roads.
- Red flashing lights on buses indicates students are either entering or exiting the bus.
- Motorists are not required to stop for a bus if the bus is on the opposite side of a separated roadway (median, etc.) — but they should remain alert for children.
- Altering a route or schedule to avoid a bus is one way motorists can help improve safety. In doing so, motorists won’t find themselves behind a bus and as a result, potentially putting children at risk.
- Watch for school crossing patrols and pedestrians. Reduce speeds in and around school zones.
- Watch and stop for pedestrians — the law applies to all street corners, for both marked and unmarked crosswalks (all street corners) — every corner is a crosswalk.

Why Don't School Buses Have Seat Belts?

- School buses are larger and heavier, which means that the mass and weight of the bus is designed to take the bulk of the crash force. They are also far less likely to rollover in a crash.
- School buses must be federally regulated to provide for compartmentalization. Compartmentalization means that the interior of large school buses must provide occupant protection so that children are protected without the need to buckle up. This is done through strong, closely spaced seats, energy absorbing foam seat backs, and a 24-inch seat height. Visualize this by thinking how an egg carton protects the eggs.

- The chassis of the school bus is designed to separate from the body of the bus in a crash to slow down and spread the crash forces over the entire body of the bus.