

Back to School Safety Tips for Motorists and Kids

Seems like summer is just starting to really heat up in Texas, yet it is almost time for children to go back to school. Soon motorists will be sharing the roads with school buses, children walking or on bicycles, and even lots of new teen drivers taking their first car to school. Drivers need to be vigilant because school children can be very unpredictable. They're 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 us is our best defense as drivers.

Last year in Texas, there were 625 vehicle crashes in school zones resulting in two deaths and 112 serious injuries. The most common factors contributing to these crashes were driver inattention, failure to control speed, and failure to yield the right-of-way at stop signs.

Whether your oldest is just starting kindergarten or 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 children, make sure they know the rules about school bus safety when it comes to boarding and getting off the bus. If you are 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 Service reminds drivers to follow these safety tips from the Texas Department of Transportation to prevent needless tragedies.

Tips for Driving in School Zones

- Put away your cell phone. Cell phone use is banned in active school zones, and violators face fines of up to \$200 in school zones where signs are posted.
- 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.
- Be alert for children who might dart across the street or between vehicles on their way to school.

Tips for Bicyclists

As a bicyclist, you should obey all traffic laws, including the following:

- Stop at red lights and stop signs.
- Pay attention to lane markers.
- Ride near the curb, traveling in the same direction as traffic.

- Use a light on the front and a red reflector or red light on the back of your bike while riding at night.

Tips for Pedestrians

- When there is a sidewalk, use it! Most pedestrian traffic accidents happen when someone is walking in the roadway.
- Always cross at intersections. Look left, then right, then left again before proceeding.
- Look for traffic when stepping off a bus or from behind parked cars.
- As a passenger, get in or out of a car on the curb side of the street.
- Make eye contact with drivers before you cross the street.

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

Visit <http://www.txdot.gov/driver/kids-teens/school.html> more information on back to school driving safety.

Bev Kellner, Program Manager, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Passenger Safety.

You may also contact the AgriLife Extension Office at 903-473-4580 or visit us at rains.agrilife.org. We are also on Facebook at [Facebook.com/pages/Rains-County-Family-Consumer-Sciences](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Rains-County-Family-Consumer-Sciences). Go and “Like” our page to keep up with the latest news, events, and programs offered by Family & Consumer Sciences in Rains County.

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