

Pedestrian Safety – Message to Parents

Why walk to school?

Walking to school fosters children's personal growth by building independence and important life skills. It also positively impacts on our health, safety, environment and community. Working with your child to develop healthy habits early in life will contribute to health benefits that will last a life time.

Walking helps your child meet the daily physical activity recommendations

The Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines recommend that Canadian kids aged 5-11 accumulate at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous-intensity physical activity each day, which will help improve heart health and prevent obesity. Children should accumulate at least 12,000 steps each day. However, only 5% of Canadian kids are meeting these recommendations. Walking to school is a fun and easy way to help your children meet these recommendations.

Walking to school is safer than driving to school

Many parents believe that driving to school is safer than walking. In reality, research shows that children are more likely to be injured when being driven to school than from walking to school. You can make walking both safe and fun by getting to know other parents from your school to create walking groups, and by encouraging your child to have walking buddies.

Walking to school is good for the environment

Replacing car trips with walking and cycling can reduce air pollution and can lead to significant health benefits. Traffic-related air pollution is linked with lung and heart diseases.

Walking to school is important for mental wellness and academic success

Research shows that children who walk to and from school perform better academically, feel happier, and have lower levels of stress. Exercise is important for brain development, and enhances your child's learning during class by boosting their attention and alertness. Walking to and from school with buddies also helps your child relax and builds emotional bonds.

7 tips to walk safely to school

1. **Children 10 and under** need to be with an adult or older child to cross the street. Practice good role modeling by walking with your child and showing them road safety rules so that they can develop good habits. Remember children learn from seeing and doing!
2. **Wear the right clothing.** Bundle up in the winter and protect your skin in the summer with a hat and clothing. And always wear sunscreen and sunglasses all year round. Remember to wear bright, reflective clothing or accessories in cloudy or dark conditions so drivers can see you better.
3. **Teach** your child to use their eyes and ears. Always **stop, look and listen**, even if there is a crossing guard, or traffic signals to help them.
4. **Stop** and check that cars in every lane can see you and make eye contact with the drivers. Wait until drivers have stopped before crossing the road.
5. **Look** left, right and left again. When the way is clear, or all the cars at the crosswalk or intersection have come to a full stop, teach your child to cross the road, and not to turn back or run. Children should be told not to cross between parked cars, or in the middle of a street, but at a corner.
6. **Listen** to oncoming traffic and be alert. Make it a rule for your child to not use headphones or cellphones when walking, especially when they are crossing the road. Distractions, even talking while walking, can put children in danger of being hit by a car.
7. **Walk**, don't run, while crossing the street. By running, you risk tripping and falling in the middle of the road.

Reasons to be careful in school zones

When you are driving in school zones, it's important to practice extra caution. Children 10 and under are most at risk for pedestrian related injuries. In Toronto, a child is seriously injured or killed every 17 weeks on their way to or from school. In addition:

- Children have more difficulty determining the direction of sound and judging distance or speed.
- Children are smaller and harder to see on the road, and they cannot see out of the corners of their eyes as well as adults.
- Children do not realize that drivers are paying attention to other things, not just them.
- Children do not understand that it takes longer for drivers to stop on wet or snowy roads.

What can drivers do to make school zones safer?

- When possible, park on a side street or in school designated areas and walk your child to school to avoid adding to the traffic in front of or near the school.
- Stop at crosswalks and intersections. Allow children and other pedestrians to fully cross the road before continuing on.
- Follow the school zones safety rules for your school.
- Enter and exit school zones and driveways slowly and carefully. Watch for children on and near the road in the morning and after school hours.
- Have your child exit the car on the right side nearest to the sidewalk. Staff will direct your child to go directly to the school.
- Always remember the importance of abiding by the posted traffic signs at the school. Cars should not be parking in the bus lanes or behind other parked cars in the lot. This makes it difficult and unsafe for school buses and cars as they try to maneuver around vehicles.
- Do not speed. If traffic in your neighbourhood is too fast, call the police at 416-808-2222.

For more information:

Ontario Ministry of Transportation - www.mto.gov.on.ca/english/safety

Information and resources related to safe driving practices, pedestrian safety, car seat safety, school bus safety

Parachute – <http://www.parachutecanada.org/injury-topics/topic/C14>

Tel: 647-776-5100; Toll-free: 1-888-537-7777

National, charitable organization dedicated to preventing injuries and saving lives through prevention programming and advocacy

Information, resources and workshops on a variety of injury topics (e.g. pedestrian safety, car seat safety, helmets, wheeled activities)

Toronto Public Health - www.toronto.ca/health

See Health Programs & Advice for a list of information and resources. Use search terms such as pedestrian safety, injury prevention, school resources for educators and parents

Toronto Road Safety - <https://www.toronto.ca/services-payments/streets-parking-transportation/road-safety/>

Information and resources related to road safety including Toronto's Vision Zero Road Safety Plan, road safety campaigns that can be used in the community, and the Watch Your Speed Program

Videos:**City of Toronto's Pedestrian Safety** - <https://youtu.be/R5R1grVFov8>

This video highlights four key messages to keep children safe when walking near traffic.

Parachute Walk Safe - <https://youtu.be/lbPmc3os0KY>

A short video PSA on how to walk safely on the road and sidewalk.

Vision Zero: Toronto's Road Safety Plan - <https://youtu.be/HtjfjlxHbqQ>

This video provides an overview of the Vision Zero Road Safety Plan that focuses on reducing traffic-related fatalities and serious injuries on Toronto's streets. There are six emphasis areas including pedestrians, school children, older adults, cyclists, aggressive and distracted driving, and safety for motorcyclists.