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## Back-to-school safety reminder: be aware!

With more pedestrians and bicyclists on Oregon's sidewalks and roads, back-to-school is a good time to remind everyone of the basics of being safe. The key is awareness — and taking time to be cautious and mindful can make all the difference.

“Motorists must pay attention to the task at hand, and that means slowing down in school zones, and watching for children and bicyclists,” said Julie Yip, Safe Routes to School program manager at the Oregon Department of Transportation. “Younger children aren’t able to judge speed and distance as well as adults can, so it’s the responsibility of the driver to be alert.”

With the price of gas hovering around \$4 per gallon, walking and bicycling to school may be on the increase. Parents may be surprised to find how beneficial walking or bicycling to school is for children. It gives them time for physical activity and allows them to socialize with parents and friends and get to know their neighborhoods. It’s important, however, that parents, older children and family members share responsibility to help identify safe routes to schools and teach traffic rules to younger children. Several Web sites provide guidance in making good choices, including [www.saferoutesinfo.org](http://www.saferoutesinfo.org) and [www.walknbike.org](http://www.walknbike.org). In addition, ODOT offers these safety tips:

### Driver Safety

- **Yield to pedestrians** at intersections, whether the crosswalk is marked or not. If a pedestrian is crossing at an intersection, you **must stop and wait** until the pedestrian has cleared your lane and the next lane before you may proceed.
- In school zones, the speed limit is 20 miles per hour. Flashing lights may alert you that you are in a school zone but if there are no flashing lights, the 20-mile-per-hour speed limit is in effect 7 a.m. – 5 p.m. on days when school is in session.
- Do not pass other cars stopped at a crosswalk or intersection. The drivers may be stopped for pedestrians.

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- When making a right turn at a red light, **look to the right and left** for pedestrians and bike riders as well as oncoming traffic. And if you drive a “quiet” car, remember, they can’t hear you coming!
- Where there are no sidewalks, be aware of pedestrians who might be walking along side the road, especially in neighborhoods near schools.
- Watch for unpredictable children: they may dart into the street without looking for traffic.
- Do not pass a school bus with flashing red lights.
- When backing out of a driveway or leaving a garage, watch out for children walking or bicycling to school. Always walk around your car before you get in to drive away.
- **Young drivers:**
  - It is illegal for drivers under age 18 to use a mobile communication device while driving.
  - Remember the limitations on the number of young people you can have in the car with you (varies depending on where you are in the Graduated Driver Licensing program).

### **Pedestrian safety**

- Before crossing a street, **look “left-right-left” for traffic in all directions**. Keep looking for cars and bicycles as you cross the street. Remember, you can’t hear some cars, so keep looking!
- Don’t run out into the street from between parked cars. The cars can hide you from drivers so they can’t see you.
- Watch out for cars and trucks at every driveway and intersection on your walk to school. And look for drivers in parked cars, who may be getting ready to move and don’t see you.
- Wait for a walk signal and a green light to tell you it’s your turn to cross the street. Look before you go to make sure drivers see you and have yielded or stopped. Continue looking for cars and bicycles as you cross.
- When crossing railroad tracks, stop well away from the tracks, look in both directions and listen for an approaching train. Never try to beat a train across the tracks.
- If the school has a crossing guard, be sure to obey her or him.

### **Bicyclist safety**

- Check your route with a parent or other adult. **Choose streets with low traffic volumes, slow speeds, few intersections, and bicycle lanes and sidewalks with no roadway construction.**
- Ride in the same direction as traffic, not against traffic.
- If riding or skating on the sidewalk, watch for pedestrians. Ride at a walking speed, and alert pedestrians if you are passing with a bike bell or vocally.
- Watch for cars backing out of driveways.
- At intersections, stop at the curb like a pedestrian and look for cars before crossing (left-right-left) — walk your bike across the street.
- Always wear a helmet that has been fitted correctly and approved by the Consumer Product Safety Commission.
- Make yourself more visible to drivers by wearing bright colors or adding reflective safety tape to your backpack or bike frame.
- Stay alert and ride predictably. Don’t assume motorists can see you.

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**School bus safety**

- Arrive at the bus stop early.
- When the bus approaches, stand at least five giant steps (10 feet) away from the curb.
- If you have to cross the street in front of the bus, cross at least five giant steps ahead of the bus so you and the bus driver can see each other.
- **Never walk behind the bus or go under the bus.**
- Avoid wearing any clothes or accessories that may get caught in a school bus handrail or door. The Consumer Product Safety Commission recommends that drawstrings be no more than three inches in length at the waist. Parents should caution children about attaching key rings and other items to their backpacks as these, too, may become caught on the handrail or door.

**Safety seat reminder**

Oregon law requires child passengers weighing over 40 pounds to ride in booster seats until 8 years of age or 4'9" tall. For more safety information, visit the ODOT Transportation Safety Division at [www.oregon.gov/ODOT/TS/index.shtml](http://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/TS/index.shtml).

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