

One Child's Death is One Too Many

Preventing Backovers in America's Driveways

Vehicle backover injuries and deaths occur when someone, without a driver's knowledge or awareness, is positioned behind a vehicle as the driver is backing out of a driveway or other parking spot. Most victims of backovers are the elderly and children.

To add to the tragedy of backover injuries and deaths, the driver is often a neighbor or relative. When a child is the victim, the driver may even be the child's mother or father.

Since most of these heartbreaking incidents occur in private driveways rather than on the road, they are not typically included in traffic-crash fatality data. Therefore, experts often don't agree on the exact number of children injured or killed in backover incidents each year.

But even one child who dies from a backover incident is one too many. Awareness and understanding of the problem are the first steps toward reducing the risk of backover deaths.



All Vehicles Have Blind Spots

In the case of a backover incident, the blind spot is the place behind your vehicle that you cannot see in the rear or side view mirrors — or even by craning your neck out the driver's side window. Generally speaking, the larger the vehicle, the larger the blind spot.

Blind spots for shorter drivers tend to be significantly larger as well. In addition, the elevation of the driver's seat, the shape of a vehicle's windows and mirrors, and the slope of a driveway can affect the size of the blind spot behind a vehicle.

In addition, the smaller stature of children can make them particularly difficult for a driver to see when backing up. So how do you protect a child from becoming a victim of backover?

Safety Tips for Parents

Keeping your children out of harm's way requires ongoing education, supervision, and vigilance: there simply is no single fail-safe solution. However, safety experts advise employing the following strategies to help reduce the risk of a backover tragedy occurring:

- Ensure your children are properly supervised at all times, especially wherever motor vehicles might be present.
- Teach children not to play in, under, or around vehicles — ever.
- Always assume children could be present and carefully check the street, driveway, and area around your vehicle before backing out.
- Avoid making your driveway a “playground.” If you do allow children in this area, make sure that it's only when there are no vehicles present. To further protect children who may be outside playing, separate the driveway from the roadway with a physical barrier to prevent any cars from entering.
- To prevent curious children from ever putting a vehicle in gear, never leave vehicles running, and keep all vehicles, even those in driveways and garages, locked up tight.
- When backing up, always know where all children are and have them stay in your full view and well away from your vehicle.
- Look behind you as you back out S-L-O-W-L-Y with your windows rolled down to listen for children who may have dashed behind your vehicle suddenly — and be prepared to stop!
- If you're driving an SUV or truck, remember that the blind spot behind your vehicle can be especially large: use extreme care whenever you back up.



Finally, talk with neighborhood parents about backover incidents and ask them to teach their children not to play in or around any vehicle or driveway. By working together to promote awareness and protective home and neighborhood environments, we can help to keep all our children safe.