

September - Back to School

I. Key Messages

The following key messages can be used to support the Back to School Safety Communication Campaign:

For children and parents:

- Follow the bus safety rules - make sure you always ride the bus safely.
- POINT, PAUSE, and PROCEED. Be alert at intersections and always look for danger when crossing the street.
- No helmet! No bike! Always wear your helmet when riding your bike.
- Always wear your safety gear when rollerblading, skateboarding, or riding your scooter.

For drivers:

- Everybody has a role to play in keeping our children safe.
- Always watch for children crossing roads. Be prepared to stop or slow down.
- Alternating flashing yellow or amber lights means a bus is slowing down to stop. Do the same. The only exception to this rule is when the bus is on the opposite side of a highway divided by a median.
- Stop when the school bus activates its alternately flashing red lights.
- Know and obey the speed limits in school and playground zones.

II. Fact Sheet

Drivers play a large role in back to school safety. Be alert and cautious. Watch for children and school buses. Young students need to be aware of traffic safety rules as pedestrians, bicyclists, skateboarders and as school bus passengers.

Facts to Know

- From 2008 to 2012, on average each year, approximately 240 children under 15 are killed or injured as pedestrians or cyclists.
- Twice a day, every day during the school year, more than 6,000 school buses in Alberta safely transport 300,000 children to and from school. School buses in Alberta travel an estimated 450,000 kilometres a day – that's more than 10 times around the earth.
- Approximately 70% of casualty collisions and more than 90% of property damage collisions involving a school bus occurred in urban areas. The large majority of injuries sustained by school bus occupants were reported as minor (not requiring hospital admittance).
- About 50% of the other drivers involved in collisions with school buses committed a driver error. The most common driver error committed by other drivers was following too closely.

- The maximum speed limit for school buses is different than other vehicles on the highway. School buses, with or without passengers, must not exceed 90 km/h or the posted speed limit, whichever is lower.

III. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

When are school and playground zones in effect? What is the speed limit?

When travelling in school and playground zones, drivers must pay attention to the posted signs. The speed limit in both urban and rural school zones is 30 km/h and is in effect on school days from 8 a.m. to 9:30 a.m., 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and 3 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. unless the municipality posts other times.

The speed limit in a playground zone is 30 km/h and is in effect from 8:30 a.m. to one hour after sunset. A vehicle is not permitted to pass another vehicle travelling in the same direction in either school or playground zones during the times these zones are in effect.

What should I do when approaching a school bus?

Motorists need to respect the flashing lights on a school bus, which create a safe area for children around the vehicle and are often the children's only defence when they get on or off the bus.

Why do school buses have strobe lights?

Strobe lights are to be used during conditions of reduced visibility, for example, during a blizzard or in fog, to increase the conspicuity of the school bus.

What do flashing amber lights mean?

Watch out for alternating flashing amber lights. They mean a school bus is slowing to stop and students will either be getting on or off the bus.

What do alternately flashing red lights mean?

Red means stop! The penalty for passing a school bus with its alternating flashing red lights activated is \$402 and six demerit points.

- Slow down and stop when the school bus activates its alternately flashing red lights and stop arm. This means you must stop whether you are approaching an oncoming bus or following one. The only exception to this rule is when the bus is on the opposite side of a highway divided by a median.
- Some municipalities have passed bylaws not requiring school buses to activate their alternating flashing red lights and stop arm when they stop. In this case, motorists do not need to stop but should still be cautious and watch for pedestrians when the buses are loading or unloading students.
- Proceed only when the red lights on the bus have stopped flashing.

- Watch for school buses loading and unloading children, even if the lights aren't flashing and the stop arm has been retracted.

How can children cross the road safely?

Practise the POINT, PAUSE, and PROCEED crossing system: look in all directions before crossing the street; scan for danger left, right, ahead and behind; then point across the road with your hand and arm extended and proceed when you can safely do so.

In rural areas, all bus drivers must activate the front school bus crossing arm and direct students to cross the highway in front of the crossing arm. This prevents children from occupying the blind spot directly in front of the bus and allows the bus driver to see the children.

What can I teach my children about getting to the school bus stop safely?

Walk on the sidewalk; if there is no sidewalk, walk on the left side of the street facing traffic, staying as far away from the vehicles as possible.

- Be at the bus stop at least five minutes before the school bus arrives. Never run after the school bus to try to catch up.
- Wait for the bus at a safe place at least 10 giant steps away from the road. Have younger children practise the steps to become familiar with this rule and pick a designated spot.
- Remember that if you can't see the driver, the driver can't see you either.