Schools are Opening Safety and Sharing the Roads

Slow Down: Back to School Means Sharing the Road
School days bring congestion. Yellow school buses are picking up their charges, kids on bikes are hurrying to get to school before the bell rings, harried parents are trying to drop their kids off before work. It’s never more important for drivers to slow down and pay attention than when kids are present – especially before and after school.

If You’re Dropping Off: Schools often have very specific drop-off procedures for the school year. Make sure you know them for the safety of all kids. More children are hit by cars near schools than at any other location, according to the National Safe Routes to School program.

The following apply to all school zones:
- Don’t double park; it blocks visibility for other children and vehicles.
- Don’t load or unload children across the street from the school.
- Carpool to reduce the number of vehicles at the school

Sharing the Road with Young Pedestrians:
According to research by the National Safety Council, most of the children who lose their lives in bus related incidents are 4 to 7 years old, and they’re walking.

They are hit by the bus, or by a motorist illegally passing a stopped bus. A few precautions go a long way toward keeping children safe:
- Don’t block the crosswalk when stopped at a red light or waiting to make a turn, forcing pedestrians to go around you; this could put them in the path of moving traffic in a school zone when flashers are blinking, stop and yield to pedestrians crossing the crosswalk or intersection.
- Always stop for a school patrol officer or crossing guard holding up a stop sign.
- Take extra care to look out for children in school zones, near playgrounds and parks, and in all residential areas.
- Don’t honk or rev your engine to scare a pedestrian, even if you have the right of way.
- Never pass a any vehicle stopped for pedestrians or school bus picking up or dropping off children.
- Always use extreme caution to avoid striking pedestrians wherever they may be, no matter who has the right of way.

Getting to School
Whether children walk, ride their bicycle or take the bus to school, it is vitally important that they – and the motorists around them – take proper safety precautions.

Back to School Safety Checklist:
As summer draws to a close and children start heading back to school, family life can get pretty hectic. It’s important to remember – and share with your children – some key tips that will help keep them safe and healthy throughout the school year.

Walkers:
- Walk on the sidewalk; if there is no sidewalk and you must walk in the street, walk facing traffic.
- Before crossing the street, stop and look left, right and left again to see if cars are coming. Never dart out in front of a parked car.
- Parents: Practice walking to school with your child, crossing streets at crosswalks when available.
- Never walk while texting or talking on the phone.

Bike Riders:
- Always wear a helmet that is fitted and secured properly.
- Children need to know the rules of the road.
- Ride single file on the right side of the road, come to a complete stop before crossing the street and walk the bike across.
- Watch for opening car doors and other hazards.
- Use hand signals when turning.
- Wear bright-colored clothing.

School Bus Riders:
- Teach children the proper way to get on and off the bus.
- Line up 6 feet away from the curb as the bus approaches.
- If seat belts are available, buckle up.
- Wait for the bus to stop completely before standing.
- Do not cross in front of the bus if possible, or walk at least 10 feet ahead until you can see the other drivers.

Eliminate distractions:
Research shows that taking your eyes off the road for just two seconds doubles your chances of crashing. And children can be quick, crossing the road unexpectedly or emerging suddenly between two parked cars. Reduce risk by not using your cell phone, adding make-up, texting or eating while driving.
Distracted Driving. Driver inattention is the leading factor in most crashes and near-crashes, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Distracted Driving is a Growing Cause of Michigan Car Accidents. Since 2017, the state of Michigan alarmingly became one of a handful of states where distracted drivers are responsible for doubling the number of vehicle crashes vs. those caused by drunk drivers.

Distracted driving is driving while doing another activity that takes your attention away from operating your vehicle.

There are three main types of distraction:

- Visual - taking your eyes off the road
- Manual - taking your hands off the wheel
- Cognitive - taking your mind off of what you’re doing

Distracting activities include:

- Using a cell phone and/or texting
- Eating and drinking
- Talking to passengers
- Grooming
- Reading, including maps
- Using a PDA or navigation system
- Watching a video
- Changing the radio station, CD, or MP3 player.
- Loud music

Focus on the task at hand - driving:

- Get familiar with vehicle features and equipment before pulling out into traffic.
- Preset radio stations, MP3 devices, and climate control.
- Secure items that may move around when the car is in motion. Do not reach down or behind the seat to pick up items.
- Do not text, access the Internet, watch videos, play video games, search MP3 devices, or use any other distracting technology while driving.
- Avoid smoking, eating, drinking, and reading while driving.
- Pull safely off the road and out of traffic to deal with children.
- Do personal grooming at home-not in the vehicle.
- Review maps and driving directions before hitting the road.
- Monitor traffic conditions before engaging in activities that could divert attention away from driving.
- Ask a passenger to help with activities that may be distracting.
- If driving long distances, schedule regular stops, every 100 miles or two hours.
- Travel at times when you are normally awake and stay overnight rather than driving straight through.
- Avoid alcohol and medications that may make you drowsy.

Ways to Avoid Driving Distracted in 2019

- Enable your phone’s safe driving feature. Of all cell phone related tasks, texting is by far the most dangerous activity, but mobile devices can help remove that temptation if used in the right way. Several safe driving settings are now standard on phones but need to be activated to work.
- Also, more downloadable apps have emerged to directly block a driver from using their phone, respond to messages or calls with “I can’t talk, I am driving,” and help keep a driver’s attention where it belongs. Always download safe driving apps that require you to never look at the screen while driving.
- Drowsiness is a distraction. In Michigan, drowsy driving crashes increased from 3,281 in 2016 to 3,425 in 2017. To avoid becoming a drowsy driver, get uninterrupted sleep before operating a vehicle and schedule breaks or share driving responsibilities with others.
- Choose the right number of passengers. By limiting the number of people traveling in one vehicle, as well as their level of activity, drivers can stay focused on the road vs. their passenger’s needs.
- Stop to eat. Although there are plenty of opportunities to purchase grab and go meals today, it doesn’t mean you should eat them while driving. Eating will only make a driver less attentive of other drivers, pedestrians, bicyclists, road hazards and prevent them from being able to respond in time to any driving related issue.
- Do ALL of the “other things” before driving. Answering the phone, responding to a work email, putting on lipstick, setting a driving play-list, taking a TGIF selfie, unwrapping your child’s after-school snack, or cleaning the fogged-up window are all activities that will take a driver’s eyes and attention away from driving. Have yourself and others completely ready to go before you turn the ignition.
- Disable in-vehicle technologies. So many major car manufacturers, mostly high-end, are adding technologies to new vehicles aimed to create fewer accident risks such as dashboard touch screens and digital infotainment centers. Researchers for AAA found things like heads-up displays, cellphone integration systems, and steering wheel controls could be contributing to the distracted driving epidemic.
- Taking your eyes off the road for only 5 seconds is equivalent to the time needed to travel the length of a football field.
- Even the car radio and talking with another passenger can serve as a major distracted driving hazard for a driver diagnosed with one of these disorders.
- Medication has been shown to play in the improved driving ability for those adequately diagnosed.
- Talk to your teen driver and model good driving behaviors. Teens are more easily distracted from driving than other groups because of texting, riding with friends, eating, using drugs or alcohol, playing music, and using mobile apps while driving. Parents can serve as the best role model to deter their child’s inexperienced and risk-taking behaviors that increase crash risks.
- Maintain your vehicle. A dragging fender, low pressure or wobbly tire, or loud muffler can easily distract a driver, as well as other road users, from the driving attentively. Never drive a vehicle that is not road-worthy.

Ref: Parents Magazine, National Safety Council and MIOSHA, OSHA