

Take care when driving near SCHOOL ZONES

It's been a great summer and many parents are happy to see their children returning to those hallowed halls of education. However, students and drivers alike may still have their minds on summer fun instead of on the road.

Whether the vehicle you are driving belongs to you or to the company, you need to follow the rules when it comes to school zones.

There are more than 9,000 school buses on Ontario roads during the school year and more than 800,000 children on board. The rules that govern traffic around school buses are strict for a reason.

Don Danbrook, IHSA's Manager of Regional Operations West, says school buses and their drivers are given rigorous testing and have to follow strict guidelines. Before every trip, school bus drivers must conduct a 16-point outside inspection and a 28-point inside inspection. Drivers must have a Class B licence and are required to have regular medical check-ups to ensure they meet the physical standards necessary for driving. To apply for this licence, they must also undergo criminal checks and be at least 21 years of age.

The Ontario *Highway Traffic Act* deals specifically with crossing guards. It states clearly that drivers must stop when a crossing guard is helping children cross the street near a school:

"Where a school crossing guard displays a school crossing stop sign as provided in subsection (2), the driver of any vehicle or street car approaching the school crossing guard shall stop before reaching the crossing and shall remain stopped until all persons, including the school crossing guard, have cleared the half of the roadway upon which the vehicle or street car is travelling and it is safe to proceed" (section 175).

According to the Ministry of Transportation, school bus drivers are rarely the cause of collisions. In fact, when they are involved in crashes that result in fatalities or injuries, they are more likely than other drivers in similar crashes to be driving properly (57 per cent compared to 47 per cent).





The major causes of collisions involving school buses are the actions of the other driver: failure to yield (29 per cent of improper driving actions), following too closely (16 per cent), speeding (11 per cent), and losing control (11 per cent).

It isn't cheap to do things the wrong way in school zones or near school buses. Vehicle owners can be charged if their vehicle passes a stopped school bus illegally. For a driver convicted of this offence, the fines can range from \$400 to \$2,000 along with six demerit points.

The following information from the Canadian Automobile Association provides some helpful hints about safe driving in school zones and near school buses.

Observe school-zone speeds.

Although you should be obeying the speed limit all the time, it is especially important to go slowly and be vigilant during the school year. Children are continually crossing roads on their way to and from school and often aren't paying attention. In addition, children are often out at recess, during lunch hour, and for certain classes, so remember to drive slowly the whole day and not just during the morning and afternoon rush hour.

Obey the crossing guard.

The crossing guard is there to keep children safe. So, if you're at a set of lights and your light turns green but the crossing guard says to stop, you must obey his or her order. A child that you can't see may be still crossing the street. Whatever the reason, they are trying to protect children from harm and you must do what they say.



Be careful around school buses.

Because of the large number of children getting on and off a school bus at every stop, it is imperative that you be extra careful when you drive around a school bus. Obviously, you shouldn't pass a stopped school bus when the overhead signals are flashing (because children are often crossing the road at that time), but in addition, you should always watch your speed around school buses as a general precaution.

Watch for children darting onto the road.

Children are small, excitable creatures, and unfortunately, this can create dangerous situations on the roads. It's important to be alert behind the wheel during this back-to-school season. You never know when a small child might dart out from between two parked cars. You can't always rely on your reflexes to prevent an injury or fatality.

Don't forget about the big kids.

It's not just little kids who are going back to school. If you live near a college or university, you're probably used to the massive number of students invading your hometown each fall, and you probably don't think much about it. Often, however, these students are not as cautious as they would normally be and cross the road without looking. Being extra attentive around these students could save a life.

The back-to-school season is a time of excitement and new beginnings, but before you head out on the road this fall, be sure to refresh your memory about safe driving tips so that everyone's new beginning is a safe one.