

# SAFETY

## IN NUMBERS

*You could learn a lot from a dummy.*

## The Bus Is Your Best Bet

As the school year begins, make it a point to ensure the safety of all the children in your neighborhood as they make their way to and from school. NHTSA recommends that school children from kindergarten through high school travel to and from school in school buses—the safest means of school transportation. But we also recognize there are other ways children get to school. Many students ride bikes or walk to school, especially if they live close to the schools. Other students get dropped off by parents, drive themselves, or ride with friends. Every one of these students deserves our attention and commitment to safety.

School bus riders are safer than passenger vehicle occupants when traveling to and from school and school-related events. A bus's size, structure, and safety components provide the greatest occupant protection. Students riding in or driving passenger vehicles are the most frequent victims of motor vehicle fatalities during school travel hours. Nearly 500 students 5 to 18 years old die each year in passenger vehicles during school travel hours, and 74 percent of those fatalities are in crashes involving teen drivers.

Some students live within specified distances from school and are not given the option of riding school buses. For these students and those who choose to walk and bike to school, knowledge and practice of safe walking and biking around traffic is essential. About 100 children 5 to 18 years old are killed while walking or biking during school travel each year.

In contrast, 4 school-age children are killed each year while riding school buses during school travel hours.

**For more information, visit:**

**[www.NHTSA.gov/School-Buses](http://www.NHTSA.gov/School-Buses)**



**55 million students**

*are enrolled in elementary and secondary schools in the United States<sup>1</sup>*

**School buses keep an estimated 17.3 million cars**

*off roads surrounding schools each morning<sup>2</sup>*



**50 States have laws** requiring a driver to stop for a stopped school bus.

*Laws differ on how and when a driver may proceed past a school bus.<sup>3</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> [nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d12/index.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d12/index.asp)

<sup>2</sup> [www.trafficsafetymarketing.gov/staticfiles/tsm/PDF/schoolbus\\_safety3.pdf](http://www.trafficsafetymarketing.gov/staticfiles/tsm/PDF/schoolbus_safety3.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [nasdpts.org/Operations/documents/State\\_Laws\\_Regarding\\_Passing\\_School\\_Buses.pdf](http://nasdpts.org/Operations/documents/State_Laws_Regarding_Passing_School_Buses.pdf)



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**NHTSA**  
[www.nhtsa.gov](http://www.nhtsa.gov)

## Safety on School Buses



- School buses are the safest mode of school transportation. School buses have to meet more Federal safety standards than any other type of motor vehicle. A school bus is required to have overhead flashing lights and a stop arm for halting traffic when a school bus is loading and unloading students.
- All school buses are required to have closely spaced seats with tall and energy-absorbing seat backs as a means of occupant crash protection. Such seats provide protection in the absence of seat belts by cushioning and containing the passengers within their seating positions, which is commonly known as “compartmentalization.”
- Small school buses – those with gross vehicle weight ratings of 10,000 pounds or less – are also required to have seat belts. Since the sizes and weights of small school buses are closer to those of passenger cars and trucks, seat belts in addition to compartmentalization are needed to provide occupant crash protection. Lap/shoulder belts are required on all small school buses manufactured after October 20, 2011, for additional protection.
- When the school bus is equipped with seat belts, students should buckle up as soon as they are seated and stay buckled through the entire trip.
- Students play primary roles in their own safety on school buses. In order for compartmentalization to be optimally effective, students must remain seated and facing forward.
- Students should board the bus, go to their seats, and remain seated until the school bus stops and the driver has signaled the students to get off the bus.
- Drivers are thoroughly trained in operating school buses and know the best maneuvering to keep the bus safe. Parents and students should follow school rules and driver rules at all times.

## School Travel

Given the difficulty in identifying the purpose of travel, specific crash criteria from the Fatality Analysis Reporting System are used to identify the purpose of vehicle travel as travel to and from school, and thus crashes that occurred during school travel.<sup>4</sup> The specific criteria used to define school travel include:

1. Month of year: September 1 through June 15;
2. Days of week: Monday through Friday;
3. Hours of day: 6 a.m. through 8:59 a.m. and 2 p.m. through 4:59 p.m.

The following data provide information on crashes that occurred during school travel, based on these criteria, and detail the fatalities of school-age children ages 5 to 18. The data involve fatalities for 10 school years beginning with the 2002-2003 school year and ending with the 2011-2012 school year. On average:

- 4 school-age children are killed each year while **occupants of school buses** or other vehicles used as school buses during school travel.
- 490 school-age children are killed each year during school travel while **occupants of passenger vehicles**.
- 16 school-age children are killed each year as **motorcycle occupants** during school travel.
- 20 school-age children are killed each year in school travel crashes in **vehicles other than those listed above**.
- 75 school-age **pedestrians** are killed each year during school travel.
- 21 school-age **bicyclists** are killed in school travel crashes each year.
- 3 school-age children between 5 and 18 die as **nonoccupants** each year, but were not walking or biking (perhaps sitting in a parked car, or riding a skateboard or scooter).

<sup>4</sup> This definition is stipulated in The Relative Risks of School Travel (<http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/sr/sr269.pdf>) published in 2002 by the Transportation Research Board (TRB) of the National Academies.

## Safety Around the School Bus

Another way to look at the data is to consider a school-transportation crash as any crash that involves a school bus body vehicle, or non-school bus functioning as a school bus, transporting children to or from school or school-related activities. This definition expands the TRB definition in that it encompasses the entire calendar year as well as all times of the day and looks at children who were struck by the school bus itself or another vehicle while getting on or off ([www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/811890.pdf](http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/811890.pdf)).

From 2003 to 2012, a total of 119 pedestrians (younger than 19) died in school-transportation-vehicle-related crashes.

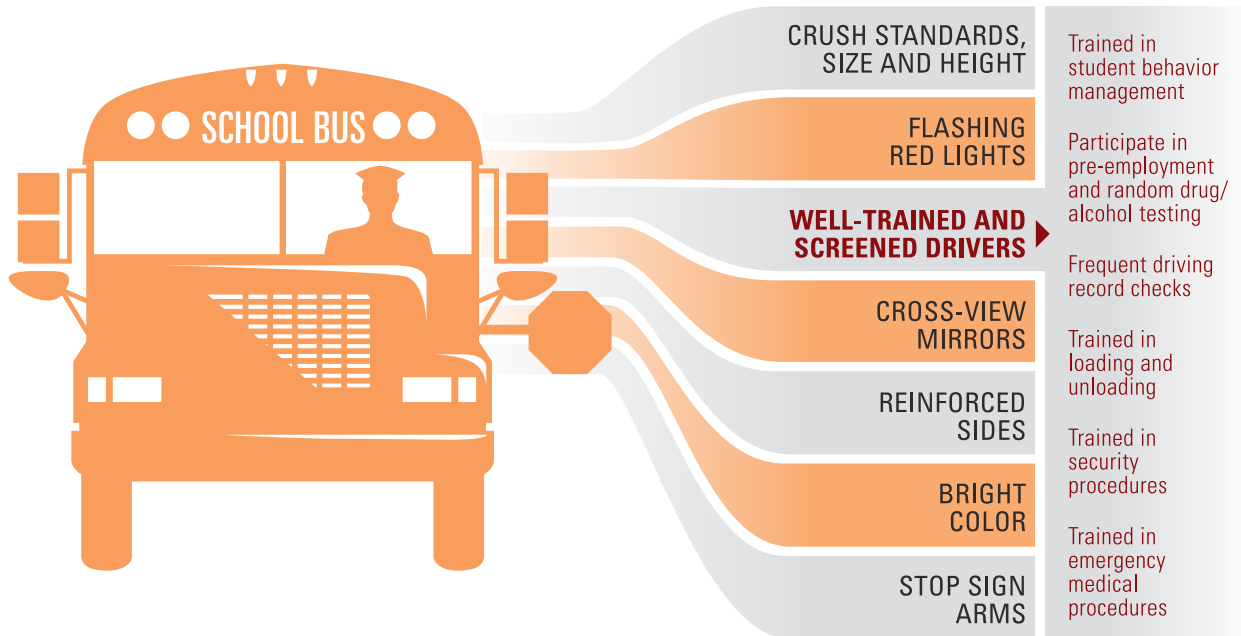
- 65 percent were struck by the bus
- 30 percent were struck by another vehicle in the crash
- 5 percent were struck by a vehicle operating as a bus (large van, for example)

## How Pedestrians Can Stay Safe Around a School Bus

- Be aware of, and careful in, the **Danger Zone** – 10 feet in front, behind, and on each side of the school bus.
- Stand far back from the approaching school bus while waiting at the bus stop.
- Wait to board the bus until the driver says it is safe.
- When getting off of the bus, walk well in front of the bus and make sure the driver sees you.
- Always watch for oncoming traffic when approaching or leaving the bus.
- Keep all loose items in your backpack. If you drop something outside of the bus, ask the driver for help.



School buses are designed with specific safety features to protect occupants during a crash. Well-trained school bus drivers add to the safety of each school bus passenger.



Planning a bus trip for your students? 

Make safety your top priority!

**LOOK BEFORE YOU BOOK**

[Learn More](#)



A school field trip may require a chartered vehicle for transportation of students, parents, and faculty. The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has developed specific guidelines to follow if your school is planning a bus trip. [www.fmcsa.dot.gov/lookbeforeyoubook](http://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/lookbeforeyoubook)

Visit [www.saferoutesinfo.org](http://www.saferoutesinfo.org) to get information on how you and your community can work together to ensure the safety of all students traveling to and from school. Safe Routes to School is a State and local program to encourage and enable safety for children getting to and from school. It combines education, encouragement, enforcement, and engineering efforts and community action to establish and maintain safe bus routes, bus stops, and safe walking and biking to school.



## Resources:

### Highway Safety Program Guideline No. 17, Pupil Transportation Policy

[www.nhtsa.gov/nhtsa/whatsup/tea21/tea21programs/402guide.html](http://www.nhtsa.gov/nhtsa/whatsup/tea21/tea21programs/402guide.html)

### 15-Passenger Van Safety

[www.nhtsa.gov/About+NHTSA/Press+Releases/2012/Consumer+Advisory:+NHTSA+Offers+Tips+for+Safe+Travel+in+15-Passenger+Vans](http://www.nhtsa.gov/About+NHTSA/Press+Releases/2012/Consumer+Advisory:+NHTSA+Offers+Tips+for+Safe+Travel+in+15-Passenger+Vans)

### Tips to Increase Your Child's School Bus Safety

[www.nhtsa.gov/parents/parents-bus.html](http://www.nhtsa.gov/parents/parents-bus.html)

### Safe Routes to School National Partnership

<http://saferoutespartnership.org/>

**School Buses** [www.nhtsa.gov/School-Buses](http://www.nhtsa.gov/School-Buses)

**Pedestrians** [www.nhtsa.gov/Pedestrians](http://www.nhtsa.gov/Pedestrians)

### Everyone Is a Pedestrian

[www.nhtsa.gov/nhtsa/everyoneisapedestrian/index.html](http://www.nhtsa.gov/nhtsa/everyoneisapedestrian/index.html)

**Bicycles** [www.nhtsa.gov/Bicycles](http://www.nhtsa.gov/Bicycles)

# WHAT YOU CAN DO



## Students

- School buses are the safest mode of transportation. Even so, your children need to be careful around the bus “danger zone” – 10 feet in front, behind, and on each side of the bus.
- Pedestrians and bicyclists 10 and younger should be accompanied by an adult or young adult. Show them how to cross the street by stopping and looking left-right-left for traffic before crossing.
- Protect yourself from getting hurt when bicycling: Wear a properly fitted bicycle helmet, learn and follow traffic safety rules, and bike defensively (always look out for all traffic).
- Children 12 and younger should ride in the back seat of the car where they are 40-percent less likely to be injured in a crash.
- Students riding in a car should be properly restrained – in appropriate car seats or by vehicle seat belts.

- Teens driving to school must adhere to their State’s graduated driving license (GDL) laws, including the number of passengers they may carry.
- Whether biking, walking, or driving, don’t text while traveling. Focus on traffic and be aware of your surroundings.

## Parents

- Talk about school bus safety with your child – both around the bus and on the bus. Communicate with the school bus driver so you can work together to enforce good practices with your child.
- Choose safer walking and bicycling routes to school for your children that have sidewalks, paths, lanes, low traffic volumes and low speeds. (Visit [www.nhtsa.gov/DOT/NHTSA/NTI/SRTS/7505-10-ChooseSafeRoutes.pdf](http://www.nhtsa.gov/DOT/NHTSA/NTI/SRTS/7505-10-ChooseSafeRoutes.pdf) to see all 10 characteristics of a safe route.) Take a walk with your children and find out for yourselves using the walkability or bikeability checklist. Visit NHTSA’s Parents Central Web site for more information. [www.safercar.gov/parents/OntheMove.htm](http://www.safercar.gov/parents/OntheMove.htm)
- Find pedestrian safety checklists at [www.nhtsa.gov/nhtsa/everyoneisapedestrian/index.html](http://www.nhtsa.gov/nhtsa/everyoneisapedestrian/index.html)
- As a parent you have the greatest influence on your child’s safe walking, biking, and driving. They will follow your lead, so stay focused on the driving task, turn off and stow cell phones while you’re driving, and establish safe traffic behaviors. Set

ground rules for your teenagers and start the conversation early.

- Stay alert and watch for students going to and coming from school. In the fall, fewer daylight hours can make it harder for motorists to see young students.
- Watch for buses and familiarize yourself with your State’s laws concerning stopping for a stopped school bus. Look for the flashing lights and stop arms on school buses. Follow police and crossing guard instructions, as well as speed restrictions, in school zones.

