

School Bus Safety for Children

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For twenty three million students nationwide, the school day begins and ends with a trip on the school bus. The greatest risk is not riding the bus, but approaching or leaving the bus. According to the National Safety Council, school buses are the safest form of ground transportation. In fact, they are about 40 times safer than the family car.

Educating children on how to be safe pedestrians is essential to school bus safety. Beginning with their first step as they leave the house, children must learn how to safely arrive at the school bus stop, board the bus, behave during the bus ride, and exit the bus.

- Get to the bus stop at least five minutes before the bus is scheduled to arrive.
- When the bus approaches, stand at least 6 feet away from the curb, and line up away from the street.
- Wait until the bus stops, the door opens, and the driver says that it's okay before stepping onto the bus.
- If you have to cross the street in front of the bus, walk on the sidewalk or along the side of the road to a point at least 10 feet ahead of the bus before you cross.
- Be sure that the driver can see you, and you can see the bus driver.
- Use the handrails to avoid falls.
- When exiting the bus, be careful that clothing with draw strings, and book bags with straps don't get caught in the handrails or doors.
- Never walk behind the bus.
- Walk at least 6 feet away from the side of the bus.
- If you drop something near the bus, tell the bus driver. **Never try to pick it up because the driver may not be able to see you.**
- **Parents** and **teachers** should teach children to follow these common sense practices to make school bus transportation safer.

School Bus Safety for Children with Special Needs

- Parents of children with special needs should be informed of the importance of incorporating appropriate and safe transportation specifications in their child's individual education plan (IEP).
- The school system can help assure optimum protection for children with special needs during the school bus transport by establishing a written plan that outlines procedures for emergency evacuation.

Many school-aged children with disabilities are transported in school buses. Wheelchairs are the primary mode of transport on school bus for many children with special needs.

The American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Injury and Poison Prevention provided the following recommendations for a child using a wheelchair and a child with special needs who is transported on a school bus:

1. Any child who can assist with transfer or be "reasonably" moved from a wheelchair, stroller, or special seating device to the original manufacturer's forward-facing vehicle seat or be "reasonably" moved to a child car seat complying with FMVSS 213 requirements should be transferred for transportation to and from school.

2. Unoccupied wheelchairs should be secured in the vehicle to prevent it from becoming a dangerous projectile in the event of a sudden stop or crash.
3. Passenger seats that have a child safety seat or restraint system attached should have a reinforced frame and meet the requirements of FMVSS 208 (occupant crash protection), FMVSS 209 (seat belt assemblies), and FMVSS 210 (seat belt anchorages).
4. All child safety seats or restraint systems must be secured to the bus seat in a manner prescribed and approved by the manufacturer.
5. Car safety seats used to transport children weighting less than 20 lb should be attached to the school bus in a rearward-facing position.
6. Occupied wheelchair(s) should be secured in a forward-facing position.
7. Three-wheeled, cart-type units and other wheelchair/stroller-type devices should not be permitted for occupied transport in a school bus. Any wheel-chair or stroller-type unit designed and approved by a manufacturer for transportation must be used to manufacturer's instructions.
8. Wheelchairs should be secured with fastening devices that are attached to the floor. Fastening devices should attach to the wheelchair at four points and must have demonstrated capabilities for restraining the wheelchair during frontal impact with force conditions of 30 mph and 20g.
9. Any occupied wheelchair should be secured with four-point tie-downs devices.
10. Lap boards or metal or plastic trays attached to the wheelchair or to adaptive equipment should be removed and secured separately for transport.
11. An occupant restraint system that has been tested at 30 mph and 20g force conditions and that includes upper torso restraint (i.e., shoulder harness) and lower torso restraint (i.e., lap belt over pelvis) should be provided for each wheelchair-seated occupant.
12. Any liquid oxygen transported in a school bus should be securely mounted and fastened to prevent damage and exposure to intense heat.

For additional information contact your Board of Education, local U.S. Department of Transportation, or local Center for Independent Living.

REFERENCES

- U.S. Department of Transportation National Highway Safety Administration.
- National Standards for Buses and National Standards for School Bus Operations. Revised Ed. Chicago, IL: National Safety Council 1990; and the American Academy of Pediatrics, AAA Policy Re Transportation of Children with Special Needs.
- National Standards for school Bus Operation: Special Education. Presented at Eleventh National Standards Conference of School Transportation May 1990; Tacoma, WA.

For additional information, contact your local Outreach and Extension Center or the MU Extension Rural Safety and Health Program, 1.800.995.8503.

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