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facts on

Child Pedestrian Safety

Did You Know?

Children under the age of 10 should always be accompanied by an adult, or an older, responsible child when crossing the street. Young children are still developing in many ways, such as their vision, hearing, and thinking. Children typically begin to develop the skills necessary to make the decisions and observations needed to cross the street safely by themselves between the ages of 9 and 11. Through guidance, encouragement, repetition, and practice from a very young age, children can learn how to cross a street safely and confidently.

Child Pedestrain Injury Statistics

In 2022, 39 child pedestrians were injured or killed in Saskatchewan. On average, there are 1,000 child pedestrian injuries in Canada each year.

Children perceive the information needed to cross the street safely very differently than adults. This fact sheet will discuss how children develop, and how their ability to remain safe while walking changes as they grow.

For More Information Contact:

1319 Colony Street
Saskatoon, SK S7N 2Z1
Bus. 306.651.4300
Fax. 306.651.4301
info@skprevention.ca
www.skprevention.ca

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Child Development and Pedestrian Safety

Cognitive Development

Children tend to focus on one thing at a time, especially if it interests them. They can be easily distracted from the task at hand by something more captivating. Even if a child has been taught the correct way to cross a street, they may still have difficulty processing all the pieces of information needed to do so safely. This includes judging the speed and distance of vehicles and determining the safe distance between vehicles for them to cross.

Between the ages of 9 and 11, children begin to make better judgements, process multiple pieces of information at one time, develop more refined motor coordination skills, and become less impulsive and more conscious of risks and the consequences of their actions.

Physical Development

Height - In traffic, a child's small stature can cause visibility problems for both the child and drivers. Children may not be able to see over and around obstacles such as parked cars, shrubs, or trees, making it hard to be seen by oncoming traffic. A child may think that if they can see the car, then the driver must be able to see them, which is not always the case.

Vision - A child's peripheral vision is not fully developed. A child looking straight ahead may not be able to detect movement to the side.

Hearing - Children may find it difficult to determine the direction of sounds or recognize the sound of an approaching vehicle. It is essential to teach children to stop at the curb, turn their head to look both left and right to make sure all cars have stopped, and ensure their path is clear before crossing the road.

Teaching Children About Pedestrian Safety

Young children are often fascinated by cars, trucks, motorcycles, and other motor vehicles. This fascination can lead to severe injury if they are not taught proper street safety. Caregivers can use this interest to start conversations early about how vehicles can be dangerous for pedestrians and the importance of being careful around them.
To safely cross the street on their own, a child must be able to consistently:

- determine the safest crossing path and be able to use it (e.g., intersections and marked crosswalks)
- assess the speed of an approaching vehicle
- make judgements on safe gaps in traffic

As role models, caregivers can demonstrate and reinforce how to cross the road safely and the skills needed to identify potential risks and hazards. To help children learn pedestrian safety, caregivers can:

- remind children to always stop, think, look, and listen when crossing a street
- teach children to treat driveways, alleyways, and parking lots like roads
- have ongoing discussions with children about how to stay safe when new situations arise (e.g., witnessing someone jaywalk, walking in an unfamiliar area, decreased visibility during a snow or rain storm, slippery roads due to ice, and walking on grid roads)
- point out different street signs and pedestrian traffic signals and discuss their meanings

How to Cross a Street Safely

1. Identify the safest crossing path.
2. Stop at the curb.
3. Listen for the sound of vehicles approaching.
4. Look left for any vehicles approaching in the left traffic lane.
5. Look right for any vehicles approaching in the right traffic lane.
6. Look left again to make sure there are still no vehicles approaching.
7. At four-way intersections, turn your head back and look over your shoulder to see if any cars are coming from behind you, and look forward to see if any cars are coming from in front of you.
8. If vehicles are present and stop, make eye contact with each driver to ensure they see you and know that you have seen them.
9. If vehicles are present, make sure that all cars have come to a complete stop before you start to cross the street.
10. If you are at a crosswalk, do not cross until all vehicles have stopped.
11. Carefully cross the street, walking at a steady pace and continue to keep your eyes and ears open for additional signs of traffic.

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The Saskatchewan Prevention Institute provides services to all those living on Treaty Lands 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 10, and the homeland of the Métis.

The Saskatchewan Prevention Institute is dedicated to moving forward on a shared path of reconciliation and partnership. We are all Treaty people.