

Pedestrian Safety: Information and Prevention

Children are hurt each year in pedestrian related traffic accidents. According to the American College of Emergency Physicians, 68,000 pedestrians were injured in traffic crashes in 2004. On average, a pedestrian is injured every 8 minutes in the United States. According to Safe Kids USA, more than 43,000 children ages 14 and under were treated in hospital emergency rooms in 2001 for pedestrian-related accidents.

Of the 91 reviewed motor vehicle fatalities among Missouri children in 2006, eight were pedestrians; three of those were age four and under; three others were between the ages of five and nine. According to Safe Kids USA, children age four and under are at greatest risk of traffic-related pedestrian death and injury. Most children are struck in streets or driveways near their homes when darting out between parked cars, walking along the edge of the road, or crossing in the middle of the block or in front of a turning car.

Safe Kids USA lists other risk factors for children:

- Childhood pedestrian injuries occur most often in residential areas and on local roads that are straight, paved and dry.
- More than half of all pedestrian injuries occur when a vehicle is backing up.
- For all age groups, traffic-related pedestrian death is twice as likely in cities as in the country.
- High traffic volume, a high number of parked cars on the street, higher posted speed limits, absence of a divided highway and few pedestrian control devices such as crosswalks are all factors that increase the likelihood of pedestrian injury.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration lists the following as risk factors for young children:

- They can not judge speed or distance of vehicles moving towards them.
- They move quickly and can run into the street without warning.
- They are small and hard for drivers to see.
- They don't know safety rules and expect adults to watch out for them.

Safe Kids USA lists the following as guidelines parents can use to keep their children safe:

- Do not allow a child under the age of 10 to cross streets alone. Adult supervision is vital until a child demonstrates traffic skills and judgments.
- Require children to carry a flashlight at night, dawn, and dusk. Reflective materials should be added to a child's clothing.
- Play in driveways, unfenced yards, and streets or parking lots should be prohibited.
- Children should take the same routes to common destinations (such as school) every time and every day. Parents should walk with their children to find the safest path. The most direct route with the fewest street crossings should be used.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, parents should teach the safe street crossing method. Children should be taught to:

- Cross with an adult or an older friend.
- Cross at an intersection where there are signals.
- Use the crosswalk when crossing near a corner. Watch for turning vehicles.
- Stop at the curb. Look left, right, left, and over the shoulder for traffic. Continue to look as you cross the street.
- Stop to look around parked cars or other objects that block the view of traffic.
- Let oncoming traffic pass, then look again before crossing, as you cross.
- Make eye contact with drivers to make sure they see you.

For more information, visit these web sites:

- Safe Kids USA, http://www.usa.safekids.org/tier2_rl.cfm?folder_id=175
- American College of Emergency Physicians, <http://www.acep.org/patients.aspx?id=26166>
- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/CPS/newtips/images/PDFs/CPSafetuTip8.pdf>