

OFFICE OF TRAFFIC SAFETY

2208 KAUSEN DRIVE, SUITE 300
ELK GROVE, CA 95758
www.ots.ca.gov
(916) 509-3030
(800) 735-2929 (TT/TDD-Referral)
(916) 509-3055 (FAX)



PRESS RELEASE

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CONTACT:

Chris Cochran
(916) 509-3063
chris.cochran@ots.ca.gov

Drivers and Students Urged to Remain Alert as Kids Head Back to School

California Office of Traffic Safety Encourages Californians to Walk, Bike, Drive Safely

Sacramento, CA– As the end of summer approaches and children start to head back into their busy school routines, the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) encourages both children and adults to remain extra cautious, not only during August's Back to School Safety Month, but every month throughout the year. This nationally-recognized month was established to promote traffic safety among children of all ages who walk, ride their bicycle, take the bus or drive themselves to and from school each day.

"We encourage parents to take an active role in educating their children about traffic safety and the best routes to take when going to school," said OTS Director Christopher J. Murphy. "It's important to remind your kids how important their safety is to you and that they need to stay alert as they travel to and from school. Drivers, especially those in school zones, need to also do their part to observe posted speed limits and be on the lookout for children."

According to data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), 188 school-aged children in California were killed in traffic related crashes in 2010. The majority of these deaths occurred in the afternoon between the after-school hours of 3 p.m. and 4 p.m. In order to make the school day safer for everyone, OTS recommends that parents share the following tips with their children:

Walking

- Before the school year starts, take practice walks so that both parents and children know the safest routes
- Always cross at an intersection or crosswalk, if available. Remember to look both ways before crossing
- When no cars are coming, walk - do not run - across the road, and keep looking for cars while crossing
- At intersections with traffic lights, watch for turning cars and obey all traffic signals
- Always walk on the sidewalk if there is one available. If there is not a sidewalk, be sure to walk facing traffic so you can see what's coming
- Do not run between parked cars and buses
- Do not run across the street or through a parking lot
- No cell phone talking or texting while going to or from school. Watch what's going on around you

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Bicycling

- Before the school year starts, take practice rides so that both parents and children know the safest routes
- Always wear a properly fitted helmet
- Always ride on the right side of the road. Never ride against traffic
- When riding in groups, always ride single file, not side by side
- Watch out for dangers in the roadway – storm drains, gravel, pot holes, trash
- Stop at all stop signs and at all traffic lights. Be extra careful at crossroads
- Watch out when riding next to parked cars. Drivers may not see you and can quickly open doors or pull into the street
- Listen for cars approaching from the side or behind you. Never wear headphones
- Know your road signs and obey them
- Always be prepared to stop
- No cell phone talking or texting while riding. Watch what's going on around you

Riding a School Bus

- If your child rides a school bus, make sure that he or she knows to remain seated at all times, to keep the aisles clear, not to throw objects, not to shout or distract the driver, and to keep his or her hands and arms inside of the bus
- When a school bus stops to load or unload passengers and its red lights are flashing, all vehicles must stop – in both directions. If the bus stop is on a divided highway, then only those vehicles approaching from the rear must stop

Drivers – Parents and Teens

Parents and caregivers:

- Follow all traffic laws and take safety precautions, especially when driving in areas where children may be present. The *maximum* speed limit in school zones is 25 MPH when children are near the road
- In school drop off and pick up zones, be extra alert and drive slowly. Watch for your children *and* all the other children too
- Do your eating and grooming before leaving home with the children. Keep your cell phone turned off until you reach work
- Children must be secured in the back seat in an appropriate car seat or booster seat if they are under the age of eight or are less than 4'9" tall

Teens:

- Your high school driving years are the most dangerous. Be aware and cautious
- Don't be distracted by cell phones, friends, or too much fun in the car
- Use your seat belts every day, every trip. Seat belts save more lives than anything else
- Take it easy. It takes a couple of years before you really know how to drive in all circumstances

For more information on back to school safety and how to drive without distractions, please visit the OTS www.OTS.ca.gov. Additional updates and information can be found on www.facebook.com/CaliforniaOTS or by following OTS on Twitter @OTS_CA.