

Sidewalk Safety

School begins this week — drivers, parents and kids all need to be aware to stay safe

Most Tri-Cities-area children will begin school this week, and Hanford commuters will need to be aware that children will be walking, riding buses and cycling to and from school. All drivers need to be aware of the school-zone speed limits and the increased presence of children on the sidewalks and streets. Those of us with children must help them be aware of some basic traffic safety rules.

Drivers need to be aware of school-zone speed limits. In Washington, the limit is 20 miles per hour, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. However, there are four approved exceptions. In those cases, signs indicate that you only need to obey the 20-mph rule when flagged, when flashing, when children are present or within a specific time period.

The Washington State Department of Transportation defines “when children are present” as when schoolchildren are within a marked crosswalk; are at the curb or on the roadway’s shoulder and are about to use the marked crosswalk; or are present along the roadway (either on the adjacent sidewalk or, in the absence of sidewalks, on the shoulder) within the posted speed limit zone, which extends 300 feet in either direction from the marked crosswalk.

Studies have shown that younger children have difficulty in making safe judgments about traffic dangers. Parents should teach their children the following rules:

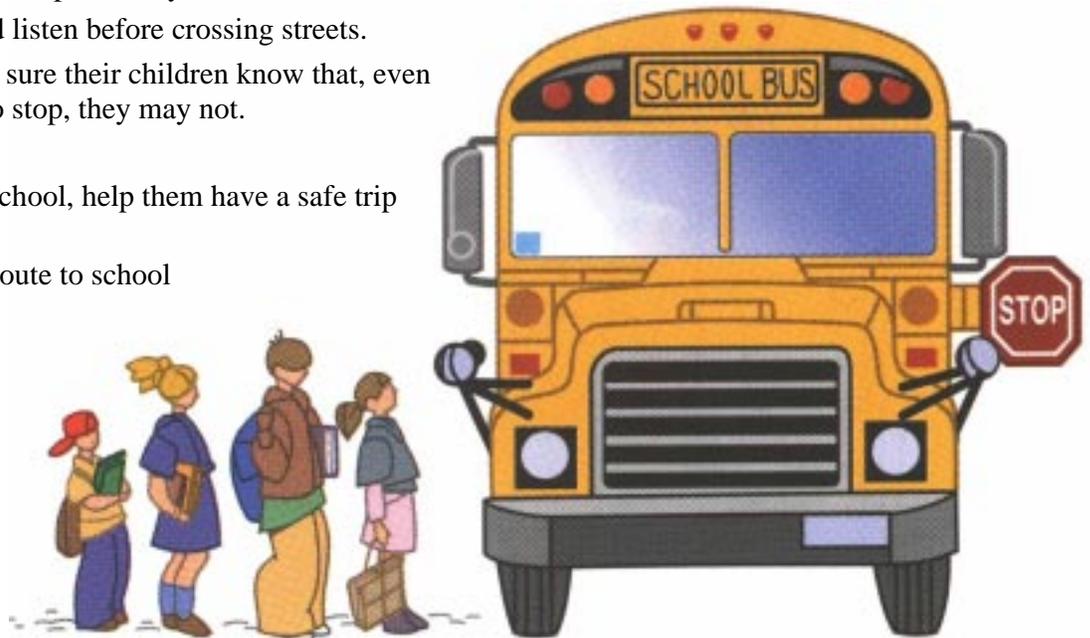
- Don’t play in the street
- Don’t dart into the road after pets or toys
- Stop, look both ways and listen before crossing streets.

Parents should also make sure their children know that, even though cars are supposed to stop, they may not.

If your children walk to school, help them have a safe trip by doing the following:

- Planning a safe walking route to school
- Walking that route with your children and pointing out areas where they should be especially careful.

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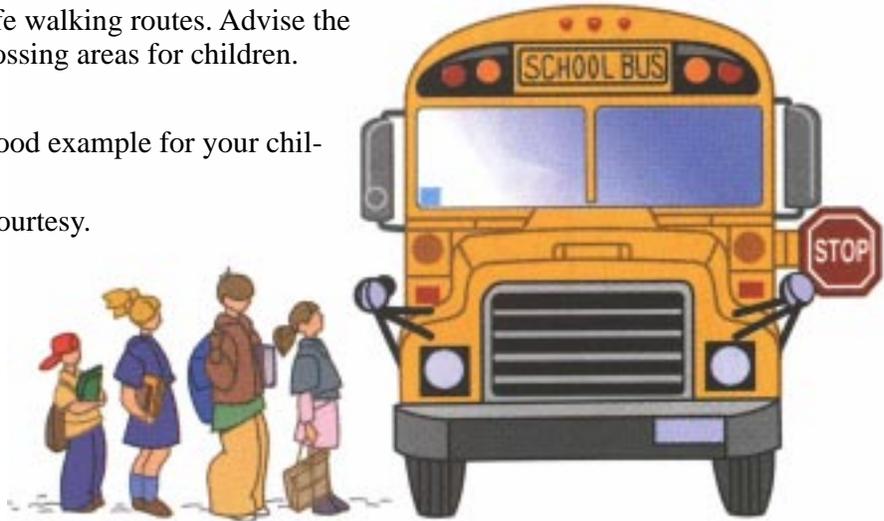


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Check with your school district for safe walking routes. Advise the school district of unsafe walking and crossing areas for children.

Children learn by example; so, set a good example for your children to obey traffic laws:

- Drive the speed limit and drive with courtesy.
- Do not double-park.
- Let children off on the correct side of the road when delivering or picking them up from school.
- Do not rush while driving. Organize yourself to leave a little earlier.
- Do not rush getting children to and from school. Your urgency may transmit to them, causing them to disregard traffic safety and run headlong across the street.



If your children ride their bicycles to school, make sure they know the rules of the road and wear bright clothing and a helmet approved by ANSI (American National Standards Institute).

Learn more traffic safety tips for children and drivers in school zones by visiting <http://www.aaawa.com/journey/archive/jan03/frontlines.html> and <http://www.metrokc.gov/kcdot/roads/rwneigh.htm>. ■