



Get the Facts: A Parent's Checklist for Childhood Traffic Safety

In a Nutshell

Children – whether infants in car seats or young teens on bicycles – face a wide range of daily traffic risks.

What should I know about traffic safety and children?

In 2020, 1,093 traffic fatalities — including motor vehicle crashes and pedestrian and bicycle incidents — involved children aged 14 or under, a 3% increase from 2019. Prevention begins with parent awareness and action, followed by education for even the youngest of children.

What can you do as a parent?

- Have everyone buckle up on every ride, in every vehicle, with every driver.
- Use appropriate safety seats or seatbelts every time a child is in a vehicle. Under Minnesota law, a child cannot use a seat belt alone until they are age 8, or 4 feet 9 inches tall. It is recommended to keep a child in a booster based on their height rather than their age.
- Keep children in safety seats with a complete harness system as long as possible. Most seats with a harness fit children up to 40 pounds — there are seats available that reach 50, 65 and 85 pounds, but a tall, thin child may outgrow a "convertible" seat (faces either rearward or forward) before 40 pounds.
- Inspect bicycles to make sure they are the right size and in good working order – no loose handlebars, wobbly wheels, flat tires or loose chains.
- Don't allow a child (typically under age 10) to cross streets alone. Every child is different, but developmentally, most kids are unable to judge the speed and distance of oncoming cars until age 10.

A nationwide childhood injury and death study concluded 20% of the children involved in fatal vehicle crashes — and 43% of those who die in such crashes — were not buckled in properly, and 13% were inappropriately seated in the front seat of the vehicle.

What should children know?

- Buckle up on every ride, in every vehicle, with every driver.
- Stop at the curb, or the edge of the road if there is no curb, before crossing the street.





- Look both ways before crossing the street, and cross at designated crosswalks or at intersections.
- Walk facing traffic, on sidewalks or paths. Walk as far left as possible if there are no sidewalks.
- Wear bicycle helmets correctly – centered on top of the head and always fitted snugly with straps buckled.
- Ride bicycle with traffic flow and as far to the right as possible if there are no sidewalks.
- Always obey traffic signals and lights as a bicyclist and pedestrian.
- Never play in or around cars.
- Never ride in the bed of a pickup truck.
- Never walk on railroad tracks and stay away from rail yards, railroad cars and rail equipment.

Sources: National Safety Council
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
Safe Kids Worldwide
Journal of Pediatrics

