

Back To School Travel Safety Tips

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following is the fifth in a series of articles that will appear occasionally from the Bollinger County Emergency Responders

It is that time of year again when parents and children across the country are preparing to go back to school.

School days bring congestion: School buses are picking up their passengers, kids on bikes are hurrying to get to school before the bell rings, hurried parents are trying to drop their kids off before work. It is never more important for drivers to slow down and pay attention than when kids are present – especially before and after school.

- **STOP:** Teach your child - whether walking, biking, or riding the bus to school - to obey all traffic signs and traffic officers. Remind them to routinely stop at every street.
- **HELMET:** If your child bikes, make sure they wear a helmet that meets safety standards. Research indicates that a helmet can reduce the risk of head injury.
- **STAY BEHIND BUS:** Tell your child not to bend down in front of the bus to tie shoes or pick up objects, as the driver may not see them before starting to move.
 - Make sure your child stays out of the street/road and avoids excessive horseplay while waiting for the school bus.
- **PLAN THE PATH:** Plan a walking route to school or the bus stop/pick up. Choose the most direct way with the fewest street/road crossings.
- **SAFE RIDING:** Remind your children to stay seated at all times and keep their heads and arms inside the bus while riding. When exiting the bus, children should wait until the bus comes to a complete stop, exit from the front using the handrail to avoid falls and cross the street at least 10 feet (or 10 giant steps) in front of the bus.
 - Make a habit of arriving at the bus stop at least five minutes before the scheduled arrival of the bus.
 - Do not shout or distract the driver.
 - Do not walk in the driver's "blind spot" – This is the area from the front of the bus to about 10 feet in front of the bus.
- **911:** Be sure that your child knows his or her home phone number and address, your work number, the number of another trusted adult and how to call 911 for emergencies.

Sharing the Road with School Buses

If you are driving behind a bus, allow a greater following distance than if you were driving behind a car. It will give you more time to stop once the yellow lights start flashing. **It is illegal in all 50 states to pass a school bus that is stopped to load or unload children.**

- Never pass a bus from behind – or from either direction if you are on an undivided road – if it is stopped to load or unload children
- If the yellow or red lights are flashing and the stop arm is extended, **traffic must stop**
- The area 10 feet around a school bus is the most dangerous for children; stop far enough back to allow them space to safely enter and exit the bus
- Be alert; children often are unpredictable, and they tend to ignore hazards and take risks

