

School Bus Safety

Information for parents, guardians, childcare providers

Transport Canada reports that our national school bus safety record is good. There are over 20,000 school buses in Canada and from 1988 to 1997 school bus crashes resulted in an average of one fatality and possibly two to three serious injuries per year. In the majority of crashes, the bus occupants were not injured. In comparison, during the same 10-year period, there was an average of 3,600 fatalities and 250,000 injuries in vehicle crashes in Canada. Buses are very safe compared to other vehicles. However, crashes involving school buses have, understandably, a high profile and raise public concern.

The most serious problem is that of children being run over by their own school bus due to poor visibility of children standing or walking close to the bus. Students are more likely to suffer serious or fatal injuries as pedestrians when struck by the school bus or other vehicles. Students should be taught how to exit the bus and leave the area safely and motorists must understand that all vehicles must remain stopped during the load/unload. Please review these safety tips with your children.

School bus safety tips

- Always stay 10 giant steps in front of or beside the bus so that the driver can see you and you can see the driver.
- Never walk behind the bus. That's the danger zone because the bus driver cannot see you.
- Make sure your shoelaces are tied so you don't trip entering or exiting the bus.

- Scarves or loose drawstrings on clothing can be hazardous. They could catch onto the bus or bus door when entering or exiting and you could be dragged alongside the bus out of the driver's view.
- Wait for the bus in an orderly manner, so you don't fall or get pushed in front of the bus or other traffic.
- Board the bus in single file; use the handrail so you don't trip on the steps.
- Sit down right away, so you don't fall when the bus starts moving.
- Sit all the way back in your seat so the aisle is not blocked.
- Keep the aisle clear of feet, backpacks, books, etc.
- Always do what the bus driver asks.
- Talk quietly so the driver can concentrate on driving.
- Keep your head, arms, and hands inside the bus, not out the window.
- Never throw things in the bus or out the window.
- Get up to leave the bus only after it has stopped moving.
- When exiting, be sure the red lights of the school bus are flashing before you cross the road.
- Check the traffic. Be sure the drivers see you and it is safe for you to proceed before you cross.

Thanks for using your School Bus Sense!



The issue of seat belts in school buses

Summarized from Transport Canada

School buses have unique safety considerations related to their design and operation. They are mostly dedicated vehicles carrying young people of many ages, sizes and stages of development. They make multiple stops, short runs in urban environments and long runs on rural highways and side roads.

As mentioned, the small number of school bus crashes makes it possible for Transport Canada crash investigation teams to investigate many of them in detail. The main conclusion is that the occupant protection mechanisms provided in post-1980 standard school buses function well.

The Canadian Motor Vehicle Safety regulations introduced in 1982 contain comprehensive school bus passenger protection standards. Tight specifications for seat design and installation provide effective safety for the wide variety of school age passengers. Once on a bus, children's main protection comes from compartmentalization, or the even spacing of strong, securely anchored, padded seats. Federal standards currently require high-backed seats made of soft, energy absorbing materials to retain occupants in their place in the event of a crash.

Why are seat belts not required in schools buses in Canada?

Seat belts would be of potential benefit in only very few cases. In many incidents, seat belts would not have prevented serious injuries from direct intrusion into the bus by another vehicle, or an object from a passing vehicle (cargo from a truck, train, etc.). There are, however, incidents where seat belts could have prevented injury, notably involving rollover, ejection and impact with other passengers or the non-padded features of the bus interior.



Seat belts would need management by bus drivers and consistent use by passengers to be effective. (To ensure everyone buckles up, the seat belt is adjusted to the proper size to fit the variety of passengers occupying seats throughout the day.) For those not wearing the seat belt, the buckle can become a hazardous projectile during a sudden stop or crash.

Seat belts, especially lap belts without the shoulder harness, could possibly diminish the existing passenger protection by being a potential cause of injury in a severe impact for which the present school bus seats were designed and are effective. In 1984 Transport Canada testing showed that adding lap belts may result in more severe head and neck injuries for a belted occupant than for an unbelted one in a severe frontal crash. A subsequent test in 1986 showed that the only methods to increase the level of safety on school buses were the use of combination lap/shoulder belts and rear-facing seats. The use of lap/shoulder belts would require strong anchorage supports, particularly the upper anchor, which would negate the benefits of the soft, energy-absorbing seats.

Seat belts, without a booster seat, cannot be adjusted to safely restrain smaller children (four to eight years of age). A new crash test at Transport Canada is looking at methods of transporting younger and smaller children in school buses. This has become more of an issue as pre-school children are increasingly being carried in school buses.

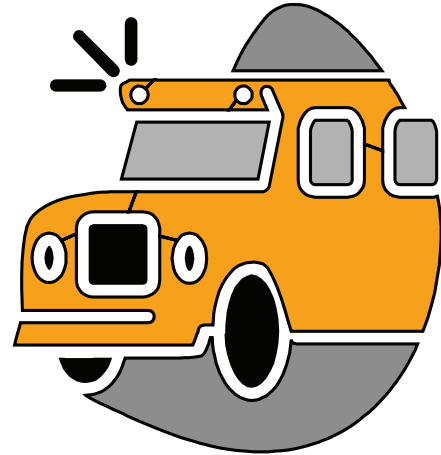
Experts agree that no restraint of any type will do anything about the biggest safety problem faced by children on school buses — when children board or exit the bus. School bus loading and unloading areas can pose serious safety issues.

What all drivers should know

Stop whenever you see flashing lights on a school bus.

A school bus that has stopped to let children off has lights at the top that flash alternately, and sometimes a swing-out stop sign. When you see a school bus with flashing lights, you must stop whether you are approaching it from the front or the rear. Vehicles in all lanes must stop.

After stopping for a school bus, don't start moving again until the bus moves on or the driver signals that it's safe by turning off the lights and pulling in the stop sign.



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