

Topic of the Month: Back to School Safety

With back-to-school season in full swing, it's time to start easing into a routine after a long summer of fun. To make the transition back to school smoother for students, parents and drivers alike, the North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) is offering a few important safety reminders.

Safe Habits for Pedestrians, Cyclists and Drivers

For students who walk and ride their bicycles to school, remember to always stay alert and follow the rules of the road. Use crosswalks and pedestrian signals and be sure to obey traffic signs and signals as well. Make eye contact with drivers to ensure they see you and always look both ways before crossing the street. For dark, early morning and foggy rides, wear bright clothing to increase visibility to others sharing the road.

Drivers play an important role in keeping the roads safe. Always be sure to follow safe driving habits such as keeping your eyes on the road, staying off your phone and maintaining the speed limit. Stay extra alert during early mornings and afternoons for students crossing and watch out for pedestrians who may be crossing the street without a crosswalk. Last, don't forget to save space for cyclists by patiently sharing the road.

School Bus Safety

In 2023, there were 2,523 crashes involving school buses in Texas, according to the Texas Department of Transportation. To prevent similar incidents, it's essential that both students and drivers understand and practice proper school bus safety.

If you're driving, always use extreme caution around school buses. Be alert and reduce your speed, especially in residential areas and near schools.

Respecting school bus stop signs is crucial. When a bus extends its stop sign and flashes its red lights, traffic in both directions (unless there's a median) you must stop. Do not proceed until the lights are off and the stop sign is retracted. Disregarding a bus stop sign is not only dangerous but also illegal. Violations can lead to a fine of up to \$1,250 for a first offense.

It's imperative to remain aware of designated bus stops. Children may be present, and their movements may be unpredictable. Go slow and be prepared to stop.

Just as it's critical for drivers to be aware of school bus safety, students should pay attention, too. Parents of students who ride the bus should educate their children on school bus safety protocols, starting with informing children to never try to enter or exit a

bus while it is moving. Make sure the bus completely stops before approaching or exiting the bus.

At home, parents can teach their children the safe distance they should stand from the road while waiting for the bus – about six feet. This is equal to three or four big steps. Another safety lesson children can learn at home is looking both ways for passing vehicles when getting off the bus. They should look left, right, then left again before crossing the street or moving away from the bus. When exiting the bus, they should cross in front of the bus, not behind it.

It's always a good idea for students to be familiar with their bus route. If you're able, show your children their bus route, pointing out safe crossing points and any potential hazards. Finally, don't forget to pack your bus-riding kiddo with any essentials, such as a water bottle, umbrella or jacket.

Safe Routes to School

To help ease traffic congestion and promote physical activity among students, NCTCOG developed the Safe Routes to School program, a vital initiative aimed at encouraging and enabling children to safely walk and bike to school. Through infrastructure improvements, like the development and improvement of sidewalks and crosswalks, educational campaigns and community engagement, this program helps create safer, healthier and more sustainable environments for students and their communities. To learn more about this initiative, visit NCTCOG's [Safe Routes to School page](#).

Look Out Texans

NCTCOG's **Look Out Texans** campaign encourages North Texans to watch out for one another and shares tips on how drivers, cyclists and pedestrians can all share the road. For more information, visit NCTCOG's [Look Out Texans page](#).