

Back to School and Fall Safety Tips from Kerry Anne Stone, M.D. and the American Academy of Pediatrics:

Returning to school and the fall season introduce new routines for families. Here are some important tips to assist families in making the transition back to school a smooth one.

Backpack Safety

- Choose a backpack with wide, padded shoulder straps and a padded back.
- Pack light. Organize the backpack to use all of its compartments. Pack heavier items closest to the center of the backpack. The backpack should never weigh more than 10-20 percent of the student’s body weight.
- Always use both shoulder straps. Slinging a backpack over one shoulder can strain muscles. Wearing a backpack on one shoulder may also increase curvature of the spine.
- Consider a rolling backpack. This type of backpack may be a good choice for students who must tote a heavy load. Remember that rolling backpacks still must be carried up stairs, and they may be difficult to roll in snow.

Traveling to and From School

Car Safety:

- All passengers should wear a seat belt and/or age and size appropriate car safety seat or booster seat.
- Your child should ride in a car safety seat with a harness as long as possible and then ride in a belt-positioning booster seat. Your child is ready for a booster seat when she has reached the top weight or height allowed for her car seat, her shoulders are above the top harness slots, or her ears have reached the top of the seat. Most children reach this around age four.
- Your child should ride in a belt-positioning booster until the vehicle’s seat belt fits properly (usually when the child reaches about 4’9” and is between 8 and 12 years of age), this means the shoulder belt lies across the middle of the chest and shoulder, not the neck or throat; the lap belt is low and snug across the upper thighs, not the stomach; and the child is tall enough to sit against the back of the seat with her legs bent at the knees and feet hanging down.
- All children under 13 years of age should ride in the rear seat of vehicles.
- Remember that many crashes occur while novice teen drivers are going to and from school. Limit the number of teen passengers in your teens car to prevent driver distraction. Do not allow your teen to drive while eating, drinking, or talking on a cell phone.

School Bus Safety:

- Wait for the bus to stop before approaching it from the curb.
- Sit on your seat and do not move around on the bus.
- Check to see that no other traffic is coming before crossing the street.
- Make sure to always remain in clear view of the bus driver.

Bicycle Safety:

- Always wear a bicycle helmet, no matter how long or short the ride.
- Ride on the right, in the same direction as auto traffic.
- Use appropriate hand signals.
- Respect traffic lights and stop signs.
- Wear bright colored clothing to increase visibility.

Know the “rules of the road” <http://www.aap.org/family/bicycle.htm>

Walking to School:

- Make sure your child’s walk to school is a safe route with well-trained adult crossing guards at every major intersection.
- Be realistic about your child’s pedestrian skills. Because small children are impulsive and less cautious around traffic, carefully consider whether or not your child is ready to walk to school without adult supervision. Children may not be able to apply general safety rules to new situations until they are about 12 years old.
- Bright colored clothing will make your child more visible to drivers.

Eating During the School Day

- Most schools regularly send schedules of cafeteria menus home. With this advance information, you can plan on packing lunch on the days when the main course is one your child prefers not to eat.
- Try to get your child’s school to stock healthy choices such as fresh fruit, low-fat dairy products, water and 100 percent fruit juice in the vending machines. Each 12 ounce soft drink contains approximately 10 teaspoons of sugar and 150 calories. Drinking just one can of soda a day increases a child’s risk of obesity by 60%. Restrict your child’s soft drink consumption.

These safety tips are recommendations by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). For further fall safety tips go to <http://www.aap.org/advocacy/releases/augschool.htm> The AAP website is an excellent resource for parents for health and safety related topics; this website is <http://www.aap.org/>



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