

Pedestrian Safety

Pedestrian injury: the statistics

Pedestrian injury is a leading cause of child injury death in Australia. Every week a child pedestrian is killed (around 50 per year).

For each child who dies as a pedestrian, 25 children will be admitted to hospital (1300 children a year).

School children most at risk

Pedestrian injuries account for 1 in 5 injury deaths for 5-14 year olds. They are second only to car passenger deaths for this age group.

Pedestrian injuries often severe

Pedestrian injuries can be severe. Head and internal injuries are common among those hospitalised. Because of this, pedestrian injuries are a significant cause of child disability.



Speed kills

A pedestrian struck by a car travelling at 30 km/h has a 95% chance of surviving, a 60% chance when struck at 50 km/h and only a 20% chance at 70km/h.

Australian research shows that a 5 km/h reduction in vehicle speeds would prevent one in three pedestrian deaths. If all vehicles kept to the speed limit, fatal pedestrian crashes would fall by 12%.

Toddlers at risk of 'drive-overs'

While most child pedestrians are injured in traffic, around one toddler a week is run over in a driveway, typically by a reversing vehicle.

Why children are at risk

Roads are designed with adults in mind, but children are not 'little adults'. They are less well developed physically, cognitively and in terms of their traffic experience. For example, children:

- Are small, and can't see over bushes or parked cars. Drivers can't see them easily.
- Are constantly 'on the move'. They may have trouble stopping at curbs, and could dart out into traffic.
- May believe (for younger children) that if they can see a driver, a driver can see them, and that cars can stop instantly.
- Imitate inappropriate behaviour.

- Have difficulty telling where sounds are coming from and may expect traffic from the wrong direction. This is true even for older children (aged 11 or 12).
- Have trouble judging the speed of cars reliably.
- Tend to concentrate for only a short time, and may only notice one thing at a time.
- Tend to focus on what is in front of them. Unless children deliberately turn their heads they may not notice vehicles to their right or left.
- May behave differently when they are with other children, forgetting about traffic.
- May 'freeze' if they find themselves in the path of a car, rather than jump out of the way.
- Because of differences like these, while we can teach children about road safety, care needs to be taken about expecting them to use safe behaviour consistently.



Toby's story

Six year old Toby walked to school with his ten year old sister and her friends.

Most mornings they used the pedestrian crossing two blocks down near their school.

On this particular morning Toby's sister was keen to buy some chips for lunch, so they crossed the road early to stop at the local deli.

They were halfway across the road when a car came out of a nearby side street and accelerated toward them.

The others crossed safely, but Toby hesitated before following. By then it was no longer safe. He ran straight into the path of the car.

As a result of the crash, Toby suffered severe head injuries. He spent one and a half weeks in intensive care, a further seven weeks in hospital, and two more months in a rehabilitation facility before returning to his family.

Due to the extent of Toby's disabilities, his mother has had to leave work in order to care for him.

Priorities for prevention

Walking is an important part of children's lives. It is important for their health and fitness, and their ability to get around their neighbourhood and community independently.

However, children are not 'little adults' (see over page - Why children are at risk). Especially for children in busy cities, being a pedestrian can be a risky business.

Here are some guidelines for helping to keep children safe as pedestrians at different ages:

Up to 5 years old

At home

- Separate play areas from cars. If possible, fence your child's play area off from driveways and the street. If this is not possible, help children choose safe places to play away from cars and driveways, and supervise them closely.



- Always walk right around your car before backing out. Have everyone else using your drive do the same.

In traffic situations

- Always be with your child. They are too young to cope alone.



- Hold your child's hand when you are near traffic.
- Set a good example for them to copy. Explain what you are doing when you cross the road together. Begin teaching them to "STOP, LOOK, LISTEN and THINK" (see From 5-9 years).
- Make sure they get in and out of cars on the kerb side.
- Ask your preschool if a traffic safety program is used.

From 5 to 9 years

Supervise your child at all times near traffic, particularly when crossing roads.

- Teach your child how to cross roads safely. Children must first stop at the kerb. Then they need to look and listen for traffic, and then decide whether it is safe to cross. ("STOP, LOOK, LISTEN and THINK")
- Make the trip to school together along the safest footpaths and use safe crossing places as an example for your child to follow.
- If you are unable to be there, arrange for your child to be supervised on the way to and from school and during after school activities.
- Explain words like "fast", "slow", "near" and "far". Talk about signs and traffic lights and the safe places to cross. Point out dangerous places and where not to cross – near curves and where things might hide children from view.
- If you are picking children up from school, have a safe meeting place, then cross the street with them. Never call them over from the opposite side of the street.
- Continue to make sure children get in and out of cars on the kerb side.
- Ask at your child's school what traffic safety programmes are taught.

From 10 to 13 years

At this age children can cope more safely in traffic on their own. However, the busier the roads they must cross, the older they need to be.

- Check your child always stops, looks, listens and thinks when crossing the road.
- Tell your child about road laws in simple terms. Go for walks together.
- Together plan safe routes to school and places your child often visits.
- Make sure your child wears clothes that are easy to see.

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For more information ☎ (08) 9340 8509

Child Safety Information Line ☎ 1800 802 244

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