What’s Up, Doc?
Back to school safety
by Peter Filuk, MD

It’s that time of year when kids are back in school after a busy summer break. Whether children walk, ride their bikes or take a bus to school, it is extremely important that they take proper safety precautions. Here are some important safety tips for travel to and from school.

Walking

✓ Review your family’s safety rules and practice walking to and from school with your child.

- Walk on the sidewalk if one is available. When on a street with no sidewalk, walk facing the traffic.
- Before you cross the street, STOP, LOOK left and right and then LOOK left once more to make sure cars are not coming.
- Make eye contact with drivers before crossing and always cross streets at crosswalks or intersections.
- Stay alert and avoid distracted walking; NO phone use while walking.
- Avoid talking with strangers. Teach children to keep distance between themselves and strangers who approach them.
- Use the same route EVERY time. Don’t teach or allow children to take short cuts.
- Walk in a group with other kids as much as possible.

Riding a bicycle

✓ Teach your child the rules of the road and practice riding the bike route to and from school with your child.

- Make sure your child always wears a properly fitted helmet and bright clothing.
- Ride on the right side of the road, WITH traffic and in single file.
- Come to a complete stop before crossing the street; walk bikes across the street; DON’T ride them while crossing.
- Stay alert and avoid distracted riding; NO phone use while riding.
- Secure bikes with a lock while at school.

Riding the bus

✓ Teach your children school bus safety rules and practice with them.

- Go to the bus stop with your child to teach them the proper way to get on and off the bus.
- Teach your children to stand 6 feet, or 3 big steps away from the curb.
Riding the bus (continued)

- If your child must cross the street in front of the bus, teach them to walk on the side of the road until they’re 10 feet ahead of the bus; your child and the bus driver should always be able to see each other.
- Don’t ever get into anyone’s vehicle while at the bus stop. Only get on the bus or parent’s vehicle (parents should always pre-arrange with their child if someone is picking them up or meeting them at the bus stop).

Driving your child to school

✓ Parents stay alert and avoid distracted driving (parents need to stay off their phones and keep their eyes on the road).

- Parents obey school zone speed limits and follow your school’s drop off procedures.
- Parents make eye contact with children who are crossing the street.

Many school related injuries are preventable. Use these tips to avoid accidents or injuries at school

✓ Backpacks: For greater visibility, choose a brightly colored, properly fitted backpack with reflectors for your child.

- Ask your child to use BOTH straps when wearing their backpack. This practice distributes weight evenly on shoulders.
- Don’t overstuff a backpack; it should NOT weigh more than 10 percent of your child’s body weight.
- Rolling backpacks should be used cautiously since others could trip over them. Check with your child’s school to see if they have policies about rolling backpacks.

Preventing Playground injuries

✓ Make sure the school has a monitor on the playground to keep the area safe.

- To prevent choking, don’t wear necklaces, clothes with draw strings or backpacks when playing on equipment.
- Playground equipment should have shock-absorbing material on the ground to cushion falls (9 inches deep and 6 feet in all directions).