

PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



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BACK TO SCHOOL SAFETY TIPS

GREAT FALLS, Montana – The summer is coming to a close and another new school year is just beginning. Class is back in session on Wednesday, August 28, and for students this means the excitement of meeting new teachers, making new friends and the opportunity to learn new things. However, for drivers, it means more traffic on city roadways. The City of Great Falls and Great Falls Public Schools (GFPS) would like to remind drivers to be mindful and cautious as more students will be on city streets in the coming weeks. Drivers are reminded not to text or talk on cell phones; to slow down in school zones; to be aware of students; and to always pay attention to school buses.

The City and GFPS would like to provide back to school safety tips for drivers and students for the upcoming school year. Superintendent Moore stated, “To the citizens of Great Falls, I would ask that when you are driving throughout our city that you would be alert and watchful for our kids and school buses. We all want our children to make it to and from school safely.”

Before classes begin, parents are encouraged to review the drop-off procedures for their child’s school. According to the National Safe Routes to School program, more children are hit by cars near schools than any other location. When you are in a school zone, remember:

- Don't double park - it blocks visibility for other children and vehicles.
- Don't load or unload children across the street from the school.
- Carpool - it reduces the number of vehicles at the school.

Here are some easy to remember back to school driving safety tips:

1. **Slow Down!** Remember to obey all traffic laws and speed limits, both in school zones and in neighborhoods around schools.
2. **Allow More Time.** As the new school year begins, allow yourself enough time to get to your destination, until you learn the effects of the increased traffic.
3. **Stay Alert!** Make a mental note of new bus stops or students walking to and from school.
4. **Stop for School Buses.** Stop when the red lights are flashing on school buses. It is against the law to pass a school bus when the lights are on. Do not proceed until the school bus resumes motion and the lights stop flashing. Never pass a bus from behind or from either direction if you're on an undivided road.
5. **Yield to Pedestrians.** When a pedestrian is in a crosswalk they have the right-of-way. Always stop for a school patrol officer or crossing guard holding a stop sign.
6. **Watch for Children.** Pay attention and watch for children walking or bicycling in areas near schools and bus stops.

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Many students walk to and from school. Here are some simple reminders for parents to share with their students:

- **Take the Safest Route** – Always pick the safest route from home to school. Take the time to walk the route with your student before the school year begins and practice walking it.
- **Use the Sidewalk** –Use public sidewalks and streets whenever possible and if there is not a sidewalk, always walk facing traffic.
- **Obey Traffic Laws** – Even pedestrians have to obey the rules of the road. Remind your student to recognize and obey traffic signals and pavement markings. Pedestrians should only cross the street at designated crosswalks, street corners and traffic controlled intersections.
- **Look both Ways** - Always look both ways before crossing the street and never enter streets from between obstacles like parked cars, shrubbery, signs, etc.
- **Be Visible** - Bright color clothing does increase visibility and can help drivers see pedestrians in the early morning hours or at dusk.
- **Walk in Groups** – There is safety in numbers, encourage your student to walk in a group to and from school. Groups are more likely to be seen by drivers.
- **Stay Alert.** Avoid distracted walking by not texting or talking on the phone. Be aware of your surroundings; do not walk with headphones in your ears.

Many students choose to ride their bikes to school. Here are some basic bike safety tips for parents to share with their students:

- Always wear a helmet.
- Use reflectors on pedals, frame, and wheels.
- Be seen, be aware, and be predictable.
- Obey the rules of the road. The rules are the same for all vehicles, including bicycles. Always stay on the right-hand side of the road and ride in the same direction as traffic.
- Obey stop signs and traffic lights.

The City of Great Falls and Great Falls Public Schools wants everyone to have a safe and enjoyable school year! For more back to school safety information contact the Great Falls Public School District at 406-268-6000.

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Safety tips adapted from the National Center for Safe Routes to Schools and the National Safety Council.