

# Child Pedestrian Safety

## Did You Know?

Children who are under the age of nine often have not developed the skills necessary to cross the street safely by themselves. Their sight, hearing, height, perception, and mental development are not the same as adults, and this decreases their ability to make safe judgments about traffic. Children, from an early age, need to be taught how to cross a street safely through repetition and encouragement. A child under the age of nine should be accompanied by adults or older children whenever they cross the street.

## Child Pedestrian Injury Statistics

Motor vehicle-related injuries to child pedestrians in Saskatchewan between 1996-1999 were:

26 deaths and 314 hospitalizations

30% of the 314 hospitalizations were to children 5 to 9 years old (highest incidence)

25% of the 314 hospitalizations were to children 1 to 4 years old (second highest incidence)



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Prevention of Handicaps

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Our Goal is Healthy Children

Children experience the information needed to cross the street safely differently than an adult. This information page will discuss how children develop and how their ability to be safe while walking changes as they grow.

## Mental Development

A child tends to focus on only one thing at a time and only on those things that are interesting to him. A child can be easily distracted from the task at hand by something that is more interesting to him. Even if a child has been taught the correct way to cross a street, he may have difficulty processing all the pieces of information that are needed to do that safely.



## Height

Most children under nine years of age are less than four feet tall. In traffic, this small stature causes visibility problems for both the child and the driver. A child may not be able to see over and around obstacles such as parked cars, shrubs or trees to spot oncoming traffic, and these obstacles may cause the drivers to be unable to see her. Even if a child is able to look around the obstacle to see the vehicle, she thinks that if she can see the car, then the driver must be able to see her, which is not always the case.

## Sight

A child's peripheral vision is approximately only 1/3 that of an adult's. This means that a child looking straight ahead will not be able to detect movement to the side. This limitation means that it is very important for a child to turn his head, and look left and right when performing a search for traffic.

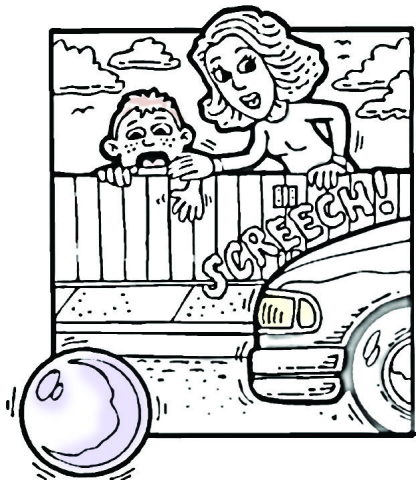
## Hearing

A child finds it difficult to tell if the sound she hears is coming from the right or the left and may look the wrong way when trying to find the location of the sound. She may also have difficulty in recognizing the sound of a vehicle and will often be unaware that it is moving towards her.

## Perception

**Speed** - is difficult for a child to judge and he may think that the size of a vehicle determines how fast it goes; believing that a large car will be going faster than a small car.

**Distance** - a child has difficulty telling how far away a vehicle is and what is a safe distance between vehicles in which to cross. A child may believe that a narrow street is safer than a wider street as he thinks the vehicles will be going slower.



**Vulnerability** - many children under 12 years of age do not understand that a vehicle could hit them causing serious injury or death. They may believe that they are invincible.

## Supervision

Children take years to grow and develop. They are not just 'little adults'. Children under nine years of age must be properly supervised by an adult or older child when crossing the road. When a child who is nine years old can demonstrate the proper techniques for crossing the street safely, he may begin to cross unsupervised.

### How to Cross a Street Safely

1. Stop at the corner.
2. Look left for any vehicles approaching in the left traffic lane.
3. Look right for any vehicles approaching in the right traffic lane.
4. Look left again to make sure there are still no vehicles approaching.
5. Turn your head back and look over your shoulder to see if any cars are coming from behind and look forward to see if any cars are coming from in front of you.
6. Make eye contact with drivers so you know that they see you and they know that you see them.
7. Make sure that any cars have come to a complete stop before you start to cross the road.
8. Carefully cross the street, still looking left and right.

#### Sources:

Safe Kids Canada  
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration  
Pfeffer, K and Barnesutti, P. "Children's auditory perception of movement of traffic sounds." *Child: care, health and development* 22.2 (1996); 129-137

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