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School is starting, make safety a priority

It's back to school time! The Illinois Insurance Association, a state property casualty trade association, and its member companies urge motorists to be alert as kids make their way to and from school in the coming weeks.

Reduce speed and drive with extra caution. Young walkers and bicycle riders can be unpredictable. Those wearing headphones may not hear approaching traffic. Be alert for a child who might dart into the roadway near a bus stop, intersection, or after exiting a vehicle. Be vigilant and ready to react.

Big yellow buses are a familiar sight at the beginning and end of the school day. Never pass a stopped school bus from either direction unless you're on the opposite side of a divided highway. Children may need to cross the road when they board or leave the bus. Don't go around a stopped school bus until its lights are off, the stop sign is retracted, and children have left the area.

Commit to distraction-free driving. Illinois law prohibits the use of cell phones in school zones, but there are countless other disruptors. Keep your hands on the steering wheel, eyes on the road ahead, and complete focus on driving.

Other tips to avoid a school transportation-related accident: obey the speed limit — especially in school zones; never block the crosswalk; follow school crossing guard instructions; respect school drop off and pick up rules.

Let's make school traffic safety a priority throughout this academic year.

Kevin J. Martin, Executive Director, Illinois Insurance Association, Springfield

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