Pedestrian Safety – the facts

Injuries are the number one cause of death and disability among children and youth in Canada

While the number of Canadian children injured or killed in pedestrian-related incidents continues to decline, each fatality remains a tragedy – most often a preventable one. Injuries to child pedestrians are often severe, and even though a youngster may survive, recovery can include long-term disabilities, emotional strain and financial burdens that may be experienced by children and their families for many years, and can last a lifetime.

In order to cross a street independently AND safely, children need three important skills that are typically NOT acquired until between 9 and 11 years of age:

1. The ability to determine and use a safe crossing route
2. The capability to realistically assess a vehicle’s speed
3. The cognitive means to judge safe gaps in traffic

This means supervising children who have not yet reached this stage!

Did you know?

- Children are vulnerable to pedestrian injuries because they have not yet developed the cognitive and physical skills to cope with the many challenges of traffic.
- The simple presence of parents or caregivers can help reduce the risk of injury.
- Children aged 10 to 14 years have the highest incidence of pedestrian-related injuries, but a larger age range of children (5 to 14 years) are at the greatest risk for pedestrian-related fatalities.
- The most frequently reported child pedestrian action that results in injury or death is crossing at an intersection followed by running onto the road.
- The majority of child pedestrian injuries and deaths occur in urban areas, however, when a pedestrian is hit on a rural road, the result is more likely to be fatal because of higher vehicle speeds.
- More children acquire pedestrian-related injuries in the months of September and October, followed by May and June.
- Children are more likely to be struck by a car in areas with heavy traffic volumes, a high density of parked cars and limited choices for play, such as a neighbourhood park. Lower income neighborhoods, particularly urban ones, have also been shown to present a higher risk for child pedestrian injuries.
- While boys have the highest rates of pedestrian injuries and deaths, the gender gap appears to be narrowing.

New Research

Preliminary research with 10 and 11 year old children provides strong evidence that talking on a cell phone while crossing a street increases a child’s risk of being struck by a vehicle by up to one third. Researchers at the University of Alabama advise parents to teach their children not to use their cell phones while crossing streets, and to give their full attention to the environment around them. The distraction of talking on a cell phone, and its negative impact on a child’s crossing decisions, leads researchers to speculate on the possible effect other devices might have, such as mp3 players or texting. They suggest that research in this area is needed.

What’s Speed Got To Do With It?

- Speed reduction reduces the risk of pedestrian injuries and fatalities.
- Increased pedestrian numbers heighten driver awareness and result in a reduction of speed.
- Trees affect speed: drivers slow down on tree-lined streets.