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Teaching Your Children to Cross the Street Can Save Their Life

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Motor vehicle-related injuries are still the [leading cause of injury-related death](#) among New York City children age 1 to 12 years old. These deaths include pedestrians or bicycle riders that are hit by a motor vehicle in addition to a child being an occupant of a motor-vehicle. Most children were not in cars when they were killed. As a member of the NYC Child Fatality Review Advisory Team (CFRAT), I review these preventable, injury deaths each year. The CFRAT hopes that public and parent awareness will help decrease these tragic child fatalities.

The 2014 report was recently released by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH). The [report](#) describes patterns of child injury for the period of 2003 through 2013. Motor vehicle-related deaths and injuries were a special focus of this year's report, as approximately 20 children die each year from these incidents and over 900 more are hospitalized due to their injuries. According to [Vision Zero](#), a NYC initiative to eliminate traffic deaths, vehicles seriously injure or kill a New Yorker every two hours.

Injury death from fires ranked second; suffocation ranked third and death due to falls ranked fourth among preventable deaths of children. The CFRAT emphasizes that although many see these deaths as "accidents" that one cannot foresee, the majority are in fact preventable as they follow patterns that can be predicted. Parents must be diligent about teaching their child safety concepts from crossing the street to not playing with matches -- and -- keep a strong lookout for their child's safety at all times.

Recommendations for parents, teachers and caregivers include the following:

Serve as a role model for safe walking and street crossing. And, yes, this means that you shouldn't cross when the traffic signal says not to, although you are tempted to...

- Teach your child to cross at the crosswalks or corner instead of in the middle of a street.
- Obey the traffic signals, don't cross, means don't cross.

- Look both ways, before you cross and listen for on-coming traffic -- there should be no distraction from wearing headphones -- or from reading or sending texts on iPhones
- Step back from the curb when you are waiting for the light to change. Fatal injuries were caused by cars, cabs and bicyclists hitting pedestrians close to the edge of the curb.

Serve as a role model for safe biking.

- Children should learn how to follow the traffic signals
- Children under twelve should ride on the sidewalk, it's allowed.
- Always wear a helmet. By law all children under 13 must wear one, but everyone should wear one.
- Wear bright colors so drivers can easily see you coming. For riding in the evening, a white headlight and red taillight are required on bikes by law and wearing reflective clothing is really smart.
- Bike with the flow of traffic. Cars, pedestrians and other cyclists expect all traffic to come from the same direction.

Tips for drivers were offered in the report too.

- New York City recently lowered its speed limit to 25 MPH in order to decrease the number of fatal accidents. Drivers everywhere should know the speed limits in their city and exercise caution.
- Many children are struck while running out from between parked cars, so please keep an eye out, especially in areas where children may be playing in parks or schools, chasing a ball, etc.
- Never talk on your cell phone
- Never text while driving. It can wait.
- Always give pedestrians the right of way, even if they are crossing at the wrong time.
- When making a turn in your car, pause before you accelerate, there will probably **always** be children or adults trying to hurry across the crosswalks.

Vision Zero and the CFRAT recommend several good websites for parents to visit for more safety information.

They include: [It CAN Wait Campaign](#), that helps drivers curb texting and cell phone use while driving.

[Safe Kids Worldwide](#) is a global organization dedicated to preventing injuries in children, the number one killer of kids in the United States. They offer very good safety information on traffic and biking safety too.

[Bike Safe, Bike Smart](#) offers rules of the road and safety tips for safe biking for all ages.

Parents, please take the time to go over these safety issues with your child on a regular basis. Make them part of your family safety planning conversations. I hope I never have to review another child fatality due to a transportation injury. They **can** be prevented.

For more information on keeping your child safe, visit nyspcc.org.