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Back To School Safety Reminders

(KLZA)-- As over 50 million students across the United States get ready to start the 2016-2017 school year, AAA reminds motorists to be aware of increased child pedestrian activity and traffic congestion in and around neighborhoods and school zones.

In 2014 more than 309 child pedestrians died and 11,000 were injured nationwide. Motorists should be especially vigilant for pedestrians during before-and after-school hours. The afternoon hours are particularly dangerous for walking children – over the last decade, nearly one-third of child pedestrian fatalities occurred between 3 and 7 p.m.

"AAA's School's Open – Drive Carefully awareness campaign is designed to curb a trend of unsafe driving behavior in school zones," said Amy Stracke, executive director, Auto Club Group Traffic Safety Foundation. "We must remind motorists to slow down and stay alert as kids head back to school."

AAA offers helpful tips to keep children safe this school year:

Follow the speed limit. School zone speed limits are purposefully set low. Children are unpredictable and may have difficulty gauging the distance and speed of an approaching car. Be alert to variable speed signs that post lower limits during certain hours when children are typically present. In Nebraska, fines for speeding are doubled in school zones.

Buckle Up! Parents who drive their children to/from school are reminded to use the proper child safety seat, booster seat or seat belt, based on the child's age and size. Nebraska law requires all children up to age six to ride correctly secured in a federally approved child safety seat. Children ages six up to age eighteen must ride secured in a safety belt or child safety seat. Children should ride in the backseat until they are at least 13 years old. Adults and teens should always buckle up, setting a good example for others in the vehicle.

Look for AAA School Safety Patrollers. With over 654,000 AAA School Safety Patrollers in 34,500 schools across the country, they're a sure sign you're approaching a school zone.

Come to a complete stop at intersections with stop signs. Research shows that more than one third of drivers roll through stop signs in school zones or neighborhoods. Always come to a complete stop, checking carefully for children on sidewalks and in crosswalks before proceeding.

Always stop for loading or unloading school buses. It may be tempting to drive around stopped school buses, but not only is it dangerous, it's against the law. In Nebraska, not stopping when approaching or overtaking a school bus which has stop lights on and the stop arm extended is unlawful. The only exception occurs when approaching a school bus in the opposite direction on a roadway divided by a median.

Eliminate driver distraction. AAA research shows that taking your eyes off the road for two seconds doubles your chances of crashing. Putting down your phone makes you a safer driver and sets a good example for young passengers and pedestrians. Get in the habit of turning your phone on airplane mode each time you get behind the wheel.

Talk to your teen. Car crashes are the leading cause of death for teens in the U.S. and more than one-quarter of fatal crashes involving teen drivers occur during the after-school hours of 3 to 7 p.m. Get evidence-based guidance and tips at www.TeenDriving.AAA.com

Be a good pedestrian. Cross at corners or marked crosswalks, never between parked cars. Listening to music, talking on the phone or playing games while walking and crossing streets should be discouraged.

Watch for bicyclists. Children on bikes are often inexperienced, unsteady and unpredictable. Slow down and allow at least three feet of passing distance between your vehicle and the bicycle. If your child rides a bicycle to school, require that they wear a properly fitted bicycle helmet on every ride.

Plan ahead. Leave early for your destination and build in extra time for congestion. Modify your route to avoid school zones and traffic.

AAA's School's Open – Drive Carefully awareness campaign was launched in 1946 to help reduce the number of school-related pedestrian injuries and fatalities.

Many Signals Communications