

Back-to-School Traffic Safety Tips for New Jersey Drivers | Part I

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As summer comes to an end and students return to the classroom, drivers can expect heavier traffic, busier intersections, and more pedestrians on roads throughout New Jersey. Morning and afternoon commutes become especially congested as parents, school buses, teachers, and student drivers all share the road at the same time.

While most people anticipate slower travel times during the school year, the return to school also creates additional risks for motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists, and children traveling to and from school. A moment of distraction, a missed stop sign, or a failure to watch for children crossing the street can have serious consequences.

Understanding how to navigate back-to-school traffic safely can help protect not only your family but also everyone else on the road. Knowing the New Jersey traffic laws that apply around school buses and school zones is an important part of doing so.

Why Back-to-School Season Increases Accident Risks

When school resumes, roadways experience a significant increase in activity. Drivers must be prepared for:

- School buses making frequent stops
- Children entering or crossing streets unexpectedly
- Increased pedestrian traffic near schools
- Bicyclists and e-bike riders traveling to and from school
- Teen drivers with limited driving experience
- Congestion during morning drop-off and afternoon pickup times

Because children may enter the roadway suddenly and can be more difficult for motorists to see, drivers should stay alert whenever they are near schools, residential neighborhoods, or bus stops.

Know When to Stop for a School Bus

One of the most important back-to-school safety rules is stopping for a school bus when required by New Jersey law.

School buses frequently stop to pick up and drop off children. Those children may cross the street immediately after getting off the bus, making it critical for drivers to remain patient and attentive.

Under New Jersey law, motorists generally must stop at least 25 feet from a school bus displaying flashing red lights when traveling on a two-lane road or on a multilane roadway where the lanes are separated only by painted lines. The same requirement applies to motorists traveling on the same side of a physically divided highway as the stopped bus.

There are limited exceptions. For example, a motorist approaching from the opposite direction on a highway separated by a safety island, raised median, or other physical barrier generally does not have to stop, but must slow to no more than 10 miles per hour while passing the bus. New Jersey law also permits motorists to pass at no more than 10 miles per hour when a school bus is stopped directly in front of a school to pick up or discharge children.

Remember:

- When the law requires you to stop, remain at least 25 feet from a school bus displaying flashing red lights.
- Do not proceed merely because you do not immediately see children nearby.
- Watch carefully for children crossing in front of or behind the bus.
- Remain stopped until the children have entered the bus or reached the side of the roadway and the bus's flashing red lights are no longer displayed.

Trying to save a few seconds by improperly passing a stopped school bus can put a child's life at risk.

Slow Down in School Zones

School zone speed limits exist for a reason. Children may suddenly enter the roadway, especially during arrival, dismissal, and extracurricular activities.

Unless otherwise posted, the speed limit in a New Jersey school zone is generally 25 miles per hour during recess, when children are clearly visible from the roadway, or while children are going to or leaving school during opening or closing hours. Some school zones may have a different posted speed limit, so drivers should always pay close attention to roadway signs.

Drivers should:

- Observe posted school zone speed limits.
- Be prepared to stop quickly.
- Watch for crossing guards and their signals.
- Avoid rushing through intersections near schools.
- Reduce distractions and actively scan for children, pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicles entering or leaving school property.

Even a small reduction in speed can improve a driver's ability to react to unexpected hazards.

Frequently Asked Questions

How far away must I stop from a school bus in New Jersey?

When New Jersey law requires a motorist to stop for a school bus displaying flashing red lights, the motorist generally must stop at least 25 feet away. This applies to traffic approaching from either direction on a roadway that is not separated by a physical barrier, as well as traffic traveling on the same side of a physically divided highway as the bus.

Do I have to stop for a school bus on the opposite side of a divided highway?

Not always. If a physical barrier, such as a safety island or raised median, separates the opposing lanes of traffic, motorists approaching the stopped bus from the opposite side generally may proceed at no more than 10 miles per hour. A painted center line alone does not create this exception.

What is the speed limit in a New Jersey school zone?

Unless otherwise posted, the speed limit in a New Jersey school zone is generally 25 miles per hour during recess, when children are clearly visible from the roadway, or while children are arriving at or leaving school during opening or closing hours. Drivers should always follow the speed limit and other instructions posted for the particular roadway.

Continue Learning About Back-to-School Driving Safety

This article is Part I of our back-to-school safety series. In Part II, we'll discuss distracted driving, pedestrian and cyclist safety, and how drivers can safely navigate busy pickup and drop-off areas.

Unfortunately, even careful drivers cannot prevent every accident. When a motorist fails to obey traffic laws, properly watch for pedestrians, or exercise reasonable care in a school zone, the consequences can be serious. If you or a loved one has been injured in a [car accident](#) in New Jersey, the personal injury attorneys at Wilentz, Goldman & Spitzer can help you understand your legal rights and the options available to you.

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