



SCHOOL ZONE SPEED LIMITS IN MINNESOTA

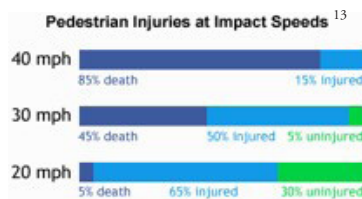
MAKING WALKING AND BIKING SAFER

May 2011

WALKING OR biking to school is less fun and more dangerous when the route involves high speed roads and wide crossings. When these types of dangers exist, students are far less likely to be allowed to walk or bike and may have to be bused across a dangerous intersection even when the student lives “across the street” from their school. A transportation system with safe walking or biking routes provides students with an opportunity for increased physical activity. Establishing safe school zone speed limits is one way to make walking and biking safer. When communities understand how school zone speed limits are established and develop strategies to enforce these speed limits, roads can be made safer for children who choose to walk or bike.

Q Why is it important to establish school zone speed limits?

A High-speed motor vehicles pose a great risk of injury for pedestrians and bicyclists as they travel to and from schools. Reduced speeds allow motorists more time to avoid collisions. A motor vehicle traveling at 50 mph requires 424 feet to come to a complete stop, while a vehicle traveling at 25 mph requires only 152 feet.¹



Reducing vehicle speed also lessens the severity of injuries for pedestrians who are struck. A pedestrian struck by a vehicle traveling at 40 mph has an 85% likelihood of being killed, whereas the likelihood of death for a pedestrian

struck by a vehicle traveling at 20 mph is only 5%²



Q What is a school zone?

A A school zone is any section of road next to public or nonpublic school property where children can enter the road. Any established school crossing is also considered a school zone.³

Q How is a school zone speed limit established?

A city council or county board (but not a school district) may establish a school zone speed limit after Mn/DOT has completed an engineering and traffic investigation.⁴ That investigation includes the preparation of a school route plan identifying the paths that children follow as they travel to school. Any hazards along this route are identified so that the risk of injury can be reduced. Mn/DOT will suggest possible solutions to hazards such as increasing pedestrian visibility, improving signage or reducing speed limits.⁵

On trunk highways, local authorities must work with Mn/DOT to get the agency's consent on the establishment of school zone speed limits.⁶

Q How does Mn/DOT conduct an engineering and traffic investigation?

An engineering and traffic investigation has two parts: preparing a school route plan and conducting a school zone hazard evaluation. In preparing the school route plan, school and traffic officials develop a map of the area that shows streets, traffic controls and established routes and school crossings. The plan attempts to minimize the number of crossings and maximize safety at crossings with the use of traffic control measures that are already in place. The other part of the investigation is the school zone hazard evaluation. This evaluation involves identifying all of the possible hazards that children may encounter en route to school. This evaluation includes collecting information on roadways, traffic volumes, pedestrian volumes, parking and loading zones, traffic control devices, sidewalks, fencing, crash history, and speed zones.⁷

Q When are school zone speed limits in effect?

A School zone speed limits are in effect whenever children are present, going to or leaving school and during recess.⁸

Q How are school zone speed limits identified for motorists?

A A school zone requires appropriate signs designating the reduced speed limit and indicating the beginning and end of the reduced speed limit zone.⁹

Q What is the speed limit in a school zone?

A City councils and county boards may establish the speed limit in a school zone. The school zone speed limit cannot reduce the speed limit on a given road by more than 30 mph and the school zone speed limit cannot be less than 15 mph.¹⁰

Example: A street where the speed limit is ordinarily 55 mph could have a speed limit of 25 mph in a school zone, but no lower. A street where the speed limit is ordinarily 30 mph could have a speed limit of no less than 15 mph.

Q What is the fine for exceeding a school zone speed limit?

A The fine for violating the speed limit in a school zone is double the ordinary fine for exceeding a speed limit unless the ordinary fine is less than \$25. Any ordinary speeding violation fine less than \$25 will have an additional \$25 added onto it in a school zone rather than being doubled.¹¹

Example: If the fine for violating a speed limit is ordinarily \$100, the fine for violating the speed limit in a school

zone would be \$200. If the fine for violating a speed limit is \$15, the fine for violating the speed limit in a school zone would be \$40.

Q How can a member of the community work to get the speed limit lowered and/or speeding fines increased in school zones?

A Community members are encouraged to work with their local government to change speed limits or increase fines. Start by identifying who is in charge of a particular road.¹² Then, work through the local process of changing the speed limit.

While school zone speed limits are an important step to increasing the safety of students as they travel to school, it is important to consider the limitations as well. Speed limits are only useful when they are enforced. If local authorities do not enforce posted speed limits, motorists may tend to disobey them.



For related publications, visit www.publichealthlawcenter.org

The Public Health Law Center provides information and technical assistance on issues related to tobacco and public health. The Public Health Law Center does not provide legal representation or advice. This document should not be considered legal advice. For specific legal questions, consult with an attorney.

1 *Slowing Down Traffic*, NAT'L CTR. FOR SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL, http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/engineering/slowing_down_traffic.cfm (last visited June 2, 2011).

2 NAT'L CTR. FOR SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL, SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOLS GUIDE 3-67 (2007) *available at* http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/guide/pdf/SRTS-Guide_full.pdf.

3 MINN. STAT. § 169.14, subdiv. 5a(c) (2010).

4 MINN. STAT. § 169.14, subdiv. 5a(a) (2010); MINN. STAT. § 169.011, subdiv. 38 (2010).

5 MINN. DEP'T OF TRANSP., MINNESOTA GUIDE TO ESTABLISHING SPEED LIMITS IN SCHOOL ZONES (2007).

6 Minn. Stat. § 169.14, subdiv. 5a(a) (2010).

7 *School Zone Speed Limits*, MINN. DEP'T OF TRANSP., OFFICE OF TRAFFIC ENGINEERING & ITS, <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/speed/schoolspeedlimits.pdf> (last visited June 2, 2011)

8 MINN. STAT. § 169.14, subdiv. 5a(a) (2010).

9 MINN. STAT. § 169.14, subdiv. 5a(b) (2010).

10 MINN. STAT. § 169.14, subdiv. 5a(a) (2010).

11 MINN. STAT. § 169.14, subdiv. 5a(d) (2010).

12 *See* PUBLIC HEALTH LAW CTR., UNDERSTANDING ROAD DESIGN IN MINNESOTA (2010), *available at* <http://publichealthlawcenter.org/sites/default/files/resources/ship-fs-rddesign-2010.pdf>.

13 *Slowing Down Traffic*, NAT'L CTR. FOR SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL, http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/engineering/slowing_down_traffic.cfm (last visited June 2, 2010)

14 *Slowing Down Traffic*, NAT'L CTR. FOR SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL, http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/engineering/slowing_down_traffic.cfm (last visited June 2, 2010)