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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Back to school means back to traffic safety basics

It's that time of year again when bus stops are full and school bells are ringing and motorists are urged to watch for children as they make their morning and afternoon commutes.

The school year officially begins Tuesday and the Michigan Office of Highway Safety Planning (OHSP) is reminding motorists to brush up on their traffic safety A-B-C's to ensure it starts safely: stay alert, obey school bus lights and use car seats and seat belts when transporting children.

In 2008, 11 pedestrians ages 6-17 were killed and 491 were injured in Michigan. Three bicyclists in the same age range were killed and 542 suffered injuries. Children should be encouraged to only use crosswalks when crossing the street and to always wear a bike helmet when riding a bike.

"Many times tragedy strikes when a child is running late for the bus or class and runs across the street without looking or from behind parked cars," said Michael L. Prince, OHSP director. "Motorists need to slow down in school zones and be alert when driving in and around schools and buses."

Drivers are also reminded to treat school bus lights like traffic signals:

- Yellow flashing lights indicate the bus is preparing to stop to load or unload children. Motorists should slow down and prepare to stop their vehicles.
- Red flashing lights and extended stop arms indicate children are getting on or off. Motorists must stop their cars and wait until the red lights stop flashing and the extended stop sign is withdrawn.

Parents who drive their children to school need to obey Michigan's seat belt and car seat laws. Children must ride in a car or booster seat until they are 8 years of age, or 4'9" tall, whichever comes first. Children up to age 16 must use seat belts in all seating positions.

In addition, children younger than four must ride in a car seat in the rear seat of the vehicle if the vehicle has a back seat. If all available rear seats are occupied by children under four, then a child under four may ride in the front seat if properly restrained in a car seat. If the child is in a rear-facing car seat, they may be placed in the front seat only if the front passenger air bag is turned off and all rear seats are occupied by children under four.

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