

Coming to a Crossroad: Important Tips for Pedestrian Safety

As the most formidable forces on the road, it's tempting to put the onus of pedestrian safety on motorists. However, there are many steps that pedestrians can take toward ensuring their own safety on the street.

Know Your Crossing Laws

The "right of way" for pedestrians is often viewed as a uniform definition, nationwide. But there is great variation among states regarding when vehicles must stop, or yield, for crossing pedestrians, as is detailed by The National Conference of State Legislatures.

While Minnesota mandates that vehicles must come to a full stop when a pedestrian appears anywhere in the road, states such as New York, Florida, North Carolina, and Arkansas (to name a few) only mandate that drivers yield, in this same scenario. There is also variation regarding when to yield to pedestrians within the driver's same half of the road. While Nebraska states that pedestrians within the same lane as a vehicle receive the right of way, Massachusetts sets the boundary at ten feet between person and vehicle. Keeping these nuances in mind can give pedestrians a clearer picture of when they can cross most safely.

Choose Your Colors Wisely

While it is certainly the responsibility of every motorist to be diligent of pedestrians around them, the color clothing you wear can factor surprisingly high in pedestrian injuries. According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, about 70% of all pedestrian-vehicle accidents happen at night. Too often, dark clothing leads to pedestrians being obscured by the night or inclement weather, which contributes to many of these accidents. It is always recommended that bright or reflective clothing be worn to increase your visibility on the road—though should you be lacking this wardrobe, a flashlight or attachable reflectors are viable alternatives.

Never Tune Out the Road

Among the most preventable causes of pedestrian-vehicle accidents, pedestrians listening to music while crossing demonstrated a 33% chance of being struck, during a study conducted by Dr. David Schwebel in 2011. According to his research, this exceeded incidents related to crossing while talking on the phone (12%) and crossing while texting (25%).

Though all are dangerous trends, and each have been steadily growing, with the number of distracted pedestrians treated for in emergency rooms doubling between 2005 and 2010—to a total of 1,500—according to a study conducted by Ohio State in 2013. With these numbers are continually rising, we must all make a conscious effort to unplug while crossing roads. Ten seconds of undistracted crossing may be the difference between a leisurely walk and a tragic event.

To read more on how to increase your safety on the road, visit The Center for Disease Control at www.cdc.gov.