

## A Road Safety Campaign for School Children from First News supported by JPIMedia

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- A class size of child pedestrians are killed or seriously injured on UK roads **EVERY week**
- Mobile devices are a growing cause of distraction for **Smombies – Smart Phone Zombies**
- Today, First News is launching a campaign to warn schoolchildren about the dangers of crossing roads while using phones. The campaign is called Look Up!

Although many people are distracted by mobile phones, children are the most affected. By the age of 12, nearly all children have a phone and there is a clear link between the use of mobile devices and the time of serious accidents involving children, particularly at the end of the school day. The Covid-19 lockdown and school closures mean the road safety figures for 2020 were affected that year. But, in 2019, 6,200 pedestrians were killed or had life-changing injuries on UK roads. More than one in five of those people (1,415) were aged 17 or under\* – that's around a whole class of schoolchildren EVERY week.

Accident data shows those aged 11 to 14 are the most likely to be killed or badly hurt – around 50 EVERY month. Different studies over a number of years have shown that phones are a growing cause of distraction for pedestrians, affecting whether they cross a road safely. There's even a name for people distracted by phones: SMOMBIES (from smartphones plus zombies).

A study by the University of Lincoln published in 2019 looked at mobile phone use by schoolchildren while crossing the road. They observed pupils outside a secondary school in the north of England over a four-week period. They were watching to see if the pupils looked (or failed to look) left and right before crossing the road, whether they crossed when the pedestrian light was on red or green and whether they crossed on the crossing. The researchers found that nearly a third (31.37%) of road crossings were made by pupils with a phone or other device and that they looked less frequently when they had them.

They concluded that the safety of school-age pedestrians is affected by mobile phones and music players. Studies in other countries such as Australia, Serbia and the US also found that pedestrians who were talking or texting on a mobile phone looked for traffic less often than others. Some countries and some states in the US have made it against the law to cross a road while using a phone.

Laboratory simulations also have shown that child pedestrians walked slower when talking on a mobile phone, paid less attention to traffic, allowed less time to cross before a car coming towards them, and had more traffic hits and misses when using a mobile phone. The 2019 official road safety numbers show that children aged 11 and 12 were the most at risk of serious accidents while walking on UK streets. The number of children killed or seriously injured more than doubled from 83 ten-year-olds to 172 11-year-olds – the age most children begin to travel on their own to and from school for the first time. This is also the age by which most children have their own phone to stay in touch with family.

The First News campaign is asking children to design Look Up! posters which will be sent to all primary and secondary schools nationwide as part of a First News Look Up! assembly pack, including classroom resources. All schools will be asked to hold the assembly in the summer and/or autumn term warning children of the dangers of mobile phone distraction while navigating roads.

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