

Talking on cellphone impedes kids' and adults' ability to cross street

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- Tapiro H, et al. *Saf Sci*. 2016;89:36-44, <http://bit.ly/2dd47ar>.

Children and adults who were talking on a cellphone while crossing the street in a virtual environment were more likely to be “hit” by a car than those who were undistracted, a recent study found.

Several studies have shown that adults are more likely to be hit by a car in a virtual environment when talking on a phone, but little data are available on how children fare in similar circumstances.

A dome facility that simulated a city street was used to compare crossing behavior by children and adults while talking on a cellphone and with no distractions. Credit: Tapiro H, et al. *Saf Sci*. 2016;89:38

In this study, 38 children and 14 adults were taken to a dome facility that uses projectors and surround sound to mimic a city street. Subjects observed various scenarios from the perspective of a pedestrian and were asked to press a button when they thought it was safe to cross the street.

During the scenarios, they either talked on a cellphone with a research assistant or were undistracted. While on the phone, they were asked basic questions about themselves, were asked to look for specific things in the street scene or were asked to do simple math problems. Participants also wore an eye tracking device.

Results showed that 53.1% of all crossing attempts by children ages 7-8 years resulted in them being “hit” compared to 25.8% of attempts by children ages 9-10, 11.5% of attempts by 11- to 13-year-olds and 2.8% of attempts by adults.

Participants were more likely to cross safely when they were undistracted or were asked basic questions, while most of the dangerous crossings occurred when they were asked to look for objects in the street scene.

Eye trackers showed both children and adults spent more time looking at the center of the scene rather than either side when they were talking on the phone.

“When busy with more cognitively demanding conversation types, participants were slower to react to a crossing opportunity, chose smaller crossing gaps, and allocated less visual attention to the peripheral regions of the scene,” the authors wrote.

“Pedestrians, regardless of age, should limit the use of cell phones when attempting to cross the road,” they concluded.



