

# Car Seat Safety

Car crashes are a top cause of death and serious injury for children. Using a car or booster seat the right way can save your child's life.

In the United States, there are laws that require car seat and booster seat use with children. Check your state's law. When you are traveling with children, follow the laws of the state in which you are driving.

Included are some general rules, but there is more to know. Always read and follow the instructions in your car seat manual.

## Choosing a Seat

There are different kinds of seats to choose from. Knowing which seat to use and when to change to another can be hard. There are often experts in your community that can help and many have interpreters if you need one.

If your baby is premature or your child has special needs, talk to your doctor about the safest way to travel with your child.

## General Rules for Seat Use

### Rear-facing Car Seat

- Babies under 1 year of age **MUST** ride rear facing. Stay rear facing until at least age 2, unless your child is above the height or weight limit of the car seat.
- Keep your baby rear-facing for as long as possible. Rear-facing is safest.

### Front-facing Car Seat

- If your child is above the height or weight limit for your rear facing seat, switch to a front facing seat.
- Use the front facing seat as long as you can, then switch to a booster seat when your child's height or weight is above the seat's limits.

### Booster Seat

- Use a booster seat until:
  - Child's back and bottom are flat against seat of car.
  - Shoulder belt fits across the middle of the shoulder and chest.
  - Lap belt fits low across the hips.
  - Knees bend at the edge of the vehicle's seat.
  - Can sit with feet on the vehicle's floor for the whole ride.

## Safety Tips

### Riding in Back is Best

- The back seat is the safest place for children under 12 years to ride.
- Never place a child in the front seat of a car or truck that has a passenger air bag.
- If a child is old enough to use an adult seat belt and must ride in the front seat, use a lap and shoulder seat belt the right way and move the front seat as far back as you can from the dashboard.

### Car Seat Tips

- Not all car seats fit in all vehicles. When installed the right way, the car seat should not move more than one inch from side to side.
- Attend a car seat safety check in your community. These may be offered by your local health department.
- Harness straps come over the shoulders and fasten in two places - over the chest and between the legs. You must fasten both!
- For small babies, a rolled up baby blanket can be placed on either side of the head or the body for support. **Do not** place anything behind the baby's back or under the baby.
- Coats, snow suits or bulky clothing should not be worn under the car seat harness. Tuck a blanket over your baby after they are strapped in, if needed.
- Baby's head may naturally turn to the side, but should not fall forward (chin on chest).
- Place something in the back seat that you need near the baby, so you don't forget to take baby out, especially when your routine is different.

### Booster Seat Tips

- Booster seats use the vehicle's adult seat belt instead of the harness straps to secure the child. The seat belt should fit low and over the hips and thighs.
- The shoulder belt crosses the center of the child's shoulder and stretched across the chest. It should not cross in front of the face or neck.
- Do not let your child put the vehicle's shoulder belt behind them or under their arms.

## Help Installing Your Car Seat

- Contact your local health department. Many offer help with buying and installing car seats.
- Contact your local hospital. Many offer help to correctly install and use car seats.