

CAR SAFETY TIPS AND CAR SEATS

A Few Facts

- More children are killed or injured from car accidents than any other injury.
- The rear seat of the car is safer than the front seat for children of any age. Children **under age 16** have a 40% reduction in risk of serious injury in the back seat compared to the front. The Academy of Pediatrics recommends that all children under age 13 years ride in the back seat. Air bags can cause severe head and spine trauma to a child whose height is less than an adult. If you must use the front seat, slide it back as much as possible. The **center rear position** is 43% safer than sitting on either side of the rear seat.
- Send in the car seat registration card so you can be notified of recalls. Do not use a car seat that is more than six years old. Do not use a car seat that has been in a crash unless you check with a Certified Child Passenger Safety Technician. (Call 908-788-MOMS). Avoid using a used car seat if you don't know its history
- For children with special needs, you can get advice about car seats from National Child Passenger Safety Certified Technicians. Website: cert.safekids.org or call 877-366-8154
- Don't allow your child to snack in the car seat while driving since choking may be silent and go unnoticed.
- Children should **never** ride in the cargo area of a pickup truck.
- A child should not be left alone in or around cars. A child can:
 - Die of heat stroke as temperature can rise to deadly levels in minutes
 - Be strangled by power windows, retracting seat belts, sunroofs or accessories
 - Be backed over by rearward moving vehicle
 - Become trapped in the trunk

Types of Car Seats

Rear Facing Only Seat- Infants/Toddlers

Weight and length recommendations vary but are always printed on the side of the seat – follow them!

- Weight range is 4 to 5 pounds up to 22-40 pounds, depending upon seat
- Maximum height 28-30 inches, depending upon seat
- Place shoulder harness slots at the level of the child's shoulders
- Retainer clip should be placed at the level of the armpit, not the abdomen or neck
- Rear facing car seats cannot be used with front seat airbag

Convertible Car Seat: Infants/Toddlers

- Can be used rear-facing and then converted to forward-facing for older children
- Follow the height and weight limits printed on the side of the seat
- May accommodate child up to 40-65 pounds, depending upon seat
- Face **rearward** until at least **2 years of age**, or until reaches the highest weight or height for the rear facing position allowed by car seat manufacturer.
 - Children age 12-23 months are five times safer facing rearward
- Tops of child's ears should be below the car seat back and shoulders below the seat strap slots
- Types
 - 5-point harness- secures hips, shoulders, and between legs – this is the best choice
 - Tray shield - a tray-like shield swings down over child's head. These are no longer made, but can be used safely until the seat's expiration date.

Forward-Facing Car Seats: Toddlers and Preschoolers

- Use when has outgrown the weight or height limit for a rear facing or convertible car seat
- Use a forward facing car seat **with harness** for as long as possible. To at least age 4 years or up to the highest possible weight or height allowed by the manufacturer
 - As general guideline a child has outgrown his forward-facing car seat in any of the following are true:
 - Reaches maximum height/weight limits
 - Shoulders above harness slots
 - Ears have reached top of seat

Belt-positioning Booster seat: School Aged Children

- For children who have outgrown a forward-facing car seat
- Should be used until child can correctly fit in adult lap and shoulder belts, typically when the child is around 4 feet 9 inches and 8 to 12 years old (NJ law states that children must be in a booster seat until they are at least 8 years old or 4 feet 9 inches)
- Purpose is to raise the child up in the seat to provide proper positioning of the car seatbelt
- Must be used with a lap and shoulder belt – booster seats often have a plastic clip or guide to correctly position the belts
- Shoulder belt should rest across the chest without touching neck or face
- Lap belt should lie over the upper thighs / hips and not over the abdomen
- Two types:
 - High back – much better safety record, preferred type
 - No back – use only if vehicle has headrests

Vehicle Seat Belt

- Made for adults
- Use a booster seat until adult seat belts fit correctly (usually when child is 4 feet 9 inches and between 8-12 years of age)
- An adult seat belt fits correctly when:
 - Shoulder belt lies over the middle of chest and shoulder, **not the neck**
 - Lap belt is low and snug across the upper thighs, **not the belly**
 - Child is tall enough to sit against the vehicle seat back with knees bent comfortably over edge of seat **without slouching**

Installation Guidelines

- Don't use child restraints with door-mounted or motorized seatbelts. The carseat will not be secure.
- Don't install a rear facing carseat in an upright position. Infants need a 45° angle to maintain an open airway. Check carseat instruction book for proper fit or get help from a certified carseat technician.
- Don't use a rear facing infant seat in a forward position. It is not designed for this and will not protect your child in a crash.
- Don't put any carseat in a non-seat position in the car/truck. Do not use side facing or jump seats to install carseats.
- Don't let your carseat become loose. Sometimes seats loosen up, even when properly installed. Check it frequently by tugging the seat where the seatbelt or LATCH system straps are routed through the seat. Also, children or other passengers in the backseat may inadvertently uninstall a seat. Make sure the carseat is secure every time you move it from one car to another.
- Always use a belt positioning booster with a lap AND shoulder belt, never just a lap belt. Read booster instructions very carefully since some require actual installation or use of a tether. Be sure the lap belt fits over the child's hips, and the shoulder belt midway between neck and shoulder.

- The rear seat of the car is safer than the front for children of any age. If you must use the front seat, slide it back as much as possible. **Rear-facing** car seats **cannot** be used with airbags in the front seat
- Certain vehicle seat belts must be used with a locking clip to keep the car seat from slipping. Check your vehicle's owner manual and car seat manual
- LATCH (Lower Anchors and Tethers for Children) became standard in September 2002.

If your vehicle was manufactured prior to this, it may not have the LATCH system.

Do not hook a LATCH clip or tether to anything but a LATCH anchor (ex: a seat spring, cargo hold, or other structure). The carseat will not stay attached if installed improperly, causing death or serious injury to the child

- Consult your vehicle owner's manual for the location of LATCH and tether anchors.
- LATCH makes installation simpler, but LATCH is no safer than using the seatbelt, as long as the seat is properly installed.
- Don't use LATCH anchors from side seat positions for installing a center position seat. Some cars do not have anchors in center position. Check car manual for proper installation. Seat will not be secure if installed in an incorrect manner.
- Don't attach two carseats to the same LATCH anchors unless directed by the vehicle manufacturer. Doing so may exceed the safe weight limit of that anchor.
- Be aware that most LATCH systems are only rated for certain weights. Check your owner's manual to see what the maximum weight of the child is permitted to use with LATCH. All lower anchors are rated for a maximum of a total of 65 pounds (car seat plus child). After that, you will need to use the seat belt system to secure the carseat for larger children.
- Don't install a carseat using BOTH seatbelt and LATCH system. Choose one system and follow instructions for installation.

After- Market (non-regulated) Products

Carseats are the *only* items that are tested under crash conditions by the Federal Regulation FMVSS213. Other products in the carseat aisle, known as 'after-market' or non-regulated products, are *not* crashed tested, and may actually interfere with how your carseat is intended to work, thus putting your child at risk for injury or worse. Use only the accessories that came with the seat when you purchased it.

Don't put heavy clothing, snowsuit, "BundleMe", "snuzzlers", or heavy blankets around infant or child before bucking into the carseat. Not only will your baby overheat if over-dressed, but the straps will not adjust tightly enough and the child will not be secure. Always place your child in the carseat with a lightweight sweater or jacket, adjust the straps and then cover and tuck a light blanket over child. A 'cover up' which goes over the seat like a fitted sheet is fine. While not crash tested, it does not interfere with how the seat functions.

Don't use replacement straps, tethers, or harness clips that are from a company other than the brand of carseat you currently have. Using third party parts may void your warranty or the integrity of the seat due to incompatibility.

Don't use sunshades that pull out of a metal or plastic frame. The shade can detach in a crash becoming a projectile and injure your child or other occupants. Use a dark plastic sheet that clings to the glass if necessary.

Don't hang toys on the handle of the carseat, unless approved by car seat manufacture. Such items become dangerous projectiles in an accident.

Resources for Additional Information

Hunterdon Medical Center and several local police departments (including Flemington Borough, Raritan Township and Readington Township) provide free child car seat safety checks performed by a Certified Child Passenger Safety Technician. The telephone number for Hunterdon Medical Center's technician is 908-788-MOMS

SeatCheck –www.seatcheck.org

National Highway Safety website: www.nhtsa.dot.gov hot line: 888-327-4236

Remember that for a car seat to work, you must properly buckle the **SEAT into the CAR** and buckle the **CHILD into the SEAT!**

Happy traveling!

T:HPA Handouts/Car Seat Tips

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Reference: *Car Safety Pediatrics in Review* Vol 30 No 12, *Car Seats: Information for Families for 2015* – *HealthChildren.org*