



Child Passenger Safety & Child Safety Seat Laws in the US

The Importance of Child Passenger Safety

Ensure children ages 12 and younger are always properly buckled in the back seat in a car seat, booster seat, or seat belt—whichever is appropriate for their age, weight, and height. Using a car seat, or commonly called a child safety seat, is the best way to protect your kids when they're in a car.

Reduce Their Risk

Motor vehicle crashes are a leading cause of death among children in the United States. In 2020, 607 child passengers* ages 12 and younger were killed in motor vehicle crashes, and more than 63,000 were injured. Of the children who were killed in a crash, 38% were not buckled up. Parents and caregivers can make a lifesaving difference by ensuring that their children are properly buckled on every trip.

- Car seat use reduces the risk for injury in crashes by 71–82% for children, compared with seat belt use alone.
- Booster seat use reduces the risk for serious injury by 45% for children ages 4–8, compared with seat belt use alone.
- Seat belt use reduces the risk for death and serious injury by about half for older children and adults.

Know the Stages (The National Standard)

Make sure children are properly buckled in a car seat, booster seat, or seat belt—whichever is appropriate for their age, weight, and height.

- Use a **rear-facing car seat** from birth until ages 2–4.
 - Infants and toddlers should be buckled in a rear-facing car seat with a harness, in the back seat, until they reach the maximum weight or height limit of their car seat. This offers the best possible protection.
 - Check the car seat manual and labels on the car seat for weight and height limits.
 - Never place a rear-facing car seat in the front seat. Front passenger air bags can injure or kill young children in a crash.

- After outgrowing their rear-facing car seat, use a **forward-facing car seat** until at least age 5.
 - When children outgrow their rear-facing car seat, they should be buckled in a forward-facing car seat with a harness and a top tether in the back seat.
 - Children should stay in their forward-facing car seat until they reach the maximum weight or height limit of this seat.
 - Check the car seat manual and labels on the car seat for weight and height limits.

- After outgrowing their forward-facing car seat, use a **booster seat** until the seat belt fits properly.
 - When children outgrow their forward-facing car seat, they should be buckled in a belt-positioning booster seat with a seat belt, in the back seat, until the seat belt fits properly without a booster seat.
 - A seat belt fits properly when the lap belt is across the upper thighs (not the stomach) and the shoulder belt is across the center of the shoulder and chest (not across the neck or face, and not off the shoulder). This usually occurs when children are between 9 and 12 years old.
 - Tip: Seat belt fit can vary by vehicle, so check seat belt fit in all vehicles where the child will ride to make sure the child no longer needs to use a booster seat. Sometimes a child might need a booster seat in one vehicle but not in a different vehicle.

- When the seat belt fits properly without a booster seat, use a **seat belt on every trip**.
 - Children no longer need to use a booster seat when the seat belt fits them properly. A seat belt fits properly when the lap belt is across the upper thighs (not the stomach) and the shoulder belt is across the center of the shoulder and chest (not across the neck or face, and not off the shoulder).
 - Proper seat belt fit usually occurs when children are between 9 and 12 years old.
 - Seat belt fit can vary by vehicle, so check seat belt fit in all vehicles where the child will ride to make sure the child no longer needs to use a booster seat. Sometimes a child might need a booster seat in one vehicle but not in a different vehicle.
 - Keep children properly buckled in the back seat through age 12 for the best possible protection.

What You Can Do

- Choose a safety seat that meets or exceeds Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard 213. *(Check product label for information and ensure that the seat meets the FMV Standards)*
- Learn how to install the seat and use the harness before your child's first ride. *(Don't depend on product displays to show you how to safely install the seat.)*
- Ensure you are following State Laws on child safety seats. *Child Seat Laws can vary state by state so please use this link to access your state's requirements*
[Governors Highway Safety Association](#)