

Keeping Young Children Safe in the Car



Car accidents are a leading cause of death for young children in the United States. We can prevent many of these deaths and many injuries by following a few simple rules.

Never hold a baby or young child in your lap when riding in a car.

Always use a National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) rated car seat. Child safety seats reduce the risk of death in car accidents by 71% for infants and by 54% for toddlers ages 1 to 4 years. The best car seat is the one that fits your child properly, is easy to use, and fits in your vehicle correctly. The Illinois 2004 Child Passenger Protection Act specifies the following:

- Children under age 8, weighing less than 40 lbs, must be secured in an approved child safety seat.
- The parent or legal guardian of a child under 8 years of age must provide a child safety seat to anyone who transports his or her child.
- Children with physical disabilities that prevent the use of standard child safety seats are exempt from the provisions of the law if the disability is certified by a physician.

The NHTSA recommends that children travel in rear-facing car seats until they reach the top height or weight limit allowed by the car seats' manufacturers. Children over this size should use forward-facing car seats with harnesses. Children taller or heavier than the recommended limits for forward-facing car seats need booster seats secured with seat belts.

Put children in the back seat—away from the air bag!

An inflating passenger air bag can kill a baby in a rear-facing safety seat if the seat is in the front. NHTSA warns against placing a child seat for infants in the front seat of any car with an air bag. The safest place for children of any age to ride is the rear seat of a vehicle.

Give each child a separate seat belt.

A child who isn't buckled up could hurt himself or someone else. Buckling two people—even two children—into one seat belt could injure both of them in a crash. Each child safety seat needs its own seat belt, too.

Never leave young children alone in a car!

- In just a few minutes alone in a car, children can be in serious danger from heat and dehydration, even if the windows are partly open.
- A child can wriggle out of a seat, hit the controls, and cause the car to move.

Remember that children don't belong in truck beds.

Allowing children to ride in a truck bed is dangerous. They can fall out of the truck bed when the driver swerves, brakes, or hits a bump. Children in a covered truck bed can become overheated. They may breathe in poisonous carbon monoxide gas from exhaust fumes.

(Statistics are taken from the NHTSA 2008 Children Traffic Safety Fact Sheet.)

For related Web resources, see “Keeping Young Children Safe in the Car” at <http://illinoisearlylearning.org/tips.htm>.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.



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