



## CPS FACT SHEET

### Child passenger restraints

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for children age 2 to 14.

[\[Traffic Safety Facts 2002—Children, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration\]](#)

Child passenger restraints save lives. Child safety seats reduce the risk of death by 71 percent for infants (less than 1 year old) and by 54 percent for toddlers (1-4 years old) in passenger cars. [\[Traffic Safety Facts 2002—Children, NHTSA\]](#)

Children age 4 to 7 who use booster seats are 59 percent less likely to be injured in a crash than children who were restrained only by a safety belt. [\["Belt-Positioning Booster Seats and Reduction in Risk of Injury Among Children in Vehicle Crashes," \*Journal of the American Medical Association\*, June 2003\]](#)

Child restraint use by infants and toddlers hit record levels in 2002. About 99 percent of infants and 94 percent of toddlers are restrained. In addition, 83 percent of children ages 4 to 7 use some type of restraint. [\[The Use of Child Restraints in 2002, NHTSA, 2003\]](#)

The number of children age 7 and under who were killed in crashes dropped to historic lows in 2002. Fatalities fell by 4.8 percent for children age 3 and under and by 12 percent for children age 4 through 7. [\[Motor Vehicle Traffic Crash Fatality and Injury Estimates for 2002, NHTSA\]](#)

In 2002, the number of children age 8 through 15 killed in crashes while traveling in a motor vehicle rose 7.9 percent, to 1,209. Crash injuries among that group rose 0.6 percent, to 160,000. [\[Motor Vehicle Traffic Crash Fatality and Injury Estimates for 2002, NHTSA\]](#)

More than 81 percent of child restraints are used incorrectly, including 88 percent of forward-facing toddler seats, 86 percent of rear-facing infant seats and 85 percent of safety belts, as determined at child passenger safety seat inspection stations across the country. [\[Child Passengers at Risk in America: A National Study of Restraint Use, National SAFE KIDS Campaign, 2002\]](#)

A third of children (33 percent) age 14 and under ride in the wrong restraint type for their age and size. [\[Child Passengers at Risk in America: A National Study of Restraint Use, National SAFE KIDS Campaign, 2002\]](#)



## **Belt-positioning Booster seats**

A booster seat raises a child up so that the safety belt fits properly. NHTSA recommends the use of booster seats in the back seat by children from about age 4 and 40 pounds to at least age 8, unless the child is 4'9" tall.

NHTSA estimates that 10 to 20 percent of the children who should be in booster seats use them. [\[NHTSA, 2003\]](#)

Moving a child to a safety belt too early greatly increases risk of injury. Children age 2 to 5 who are prematurely graduated to safety belts are four times more likely to suffer a serious head injury in a crash than those restrained in child safety seats or booster seats. [\["The Danger of Premature Graduation to Safety Belts for Young Children," Pediatrics, June 2000\]](#)

Many parents and caregivers rely on State laws for guidance on which child passenger restraint to use. But as of December 2003, only 22 States and the District of Columbia included provisions requiring booster seats in their child restraint laws and not all laws cover all children who should be in booster seats. [\[Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, 2003\]](#)

## **Back-seat placement**

The back seat is the safest place for children. More than 1,700 children in crashes have been saved since 1996 solely because they were sitting in the rear seat, which also protects them from front air bags that deploy in a crash. And despite a more than fivefold increase in the number of passenger vehicles with air bags, the rate of child air bag deaths has plunged 96 percent since 1996. [\[Air Bag & Seat Belt Safety Campaign, 2003\]](#)

Many young children still ride in the front seat. About 15 percent of infants ride in the front, as do 10 percent of toddlers ages 1 to 3 and 29 percent of children ages 4 to 7. [\[The Use of Child Restraints in 2002, NHTSA, 2003\]](#)

## **4 Steps for Kids**

NHTSA's 4 Steps for Kids guidelines show which restraint should be used for each stage of a child's development. The 4 Steps are:

- Rear-facing infant seats in the back seat from birth to at least one year old and at least 20 pounds.
- Forward-facing toddler seats in the back seat from age one to about age four and 20 to 40 pounds.
- Booster seats in the back seat from about age four and 40 pounds to at least age eight, unless 4'9".
- Safety belts at age eight or older or taller than 4'9". All children 12 and under should ride in the back seat.



## Mandatory booster seat use laws spread, but more gains needed

Child traffic safety advocates have scored a number of legislative victories recently in the battle to get more kids into booster seats. As of December 2003, 22 States and the District of Columbia required booster seats, according to [Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety](#).

In addition, starting in 2005, a Federal law will upgrade testing standards for booster seats and require automakers to install lap and shoulder belts in the center rear seat of new vehicles. The lap/shoulder belt provision is aimed at making it easier for parents and caregivers to correctly use booster seats in the middle rear seat, which many safety experts consider to be the safest place in a vehicle for children. Many automakers already voluntarily offer lap/shoulder belts in center rear seats.

The Federal measure is called "Anton's Law," named for Anton Skeen, a Washington State 4-year-old who was killed after sliding out of his safety belt in a crash in 1996. Believing Anton could have been saved by a booster seat, his mother, Autumn Alexander Skeen, became a child passenger safety advocate and was instrumental in getting a booster seat law passed in Washington State, and then at the national level.

Despite these gains at the State and Federal level, more remains to be done. An estimated 10 to 20 percent of the children who should be in booster seats actually use them, according to the [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#).

### Where booster seat use is the law

- Arkansas
- California
- Colorado
- Delaware
- District of Columbia
- Illinois
- Louisiana
- Maine
- Maryland
- Montana
- Nebraska
- Nevada
- New Hampshire
- New Jersey
- Oregon
- Pennsylvania
- Rhode Island
- South Carolina
- Tennessee
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington
- Wyoming

Source: Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety fact sheet at <http://www.saferoads.org/issues/fs-boosterseat.htm> as of December 2003

