

CHILD PASSENGER SAFETY

Car crashes are a leading cause of death in the U.S. to children 1-14 years of age according to the National Center for Health Statistics. They are also a major cause of permanent brain damage, epilepsy, and spinal cord injuries. Many of the deaths and injuries can be prevented with the proper use of car seats.

California Law

- State law says that children **must** ride in a child restraint until they are 6 years old or 60 pounds. In addition, the law requires that children over 6 years or 60 pounds must ride in a **properly fitted** seat belt until they are 16 years old. To achieve a **proper fit**, most children need to ride in a booster seat after they outgrow car seats. Make sure the lap belt fits low over the hips and the shoulder belt fits across the center of the chest. Use of booster seats requires BOTH a lap and shoulder belt.
- As of January 2005, children must ride in the back seat until they are at least 6 years old or weigh 60 pounds.
- “Kaitlyn’s Law” makes it illegal to leave a child, under 7 years old, alone in a vehicle without the supervision of someone at least 12 years old.

Recommendations

- Always read and follow the directions that come with the car seat.
- Read your car owner’s manual. It will describe how your seat belts lock, if you need to use a locking clip to put in your car seat, and if you can use a tether strap to reduce forward head movement in a crash.
- All seats have height and weight limits. Make sure you buy a seat that is appropriate for your child's height, weight, and physical needs.
- If your car seat is over 6 years old or has been in a crash, it may not be safe! Buy a new one.
- Put children under 13 in the back seat. It is the safest place for any child to ride.
- Get a tight fit! Car seats should move no more than one inch from side to side or toward the front of the car.
- Infants should face the rear of the car until they are BOTH 1 year old and weigh 20 pounds.
- NEVER put an infant facing the rear of the car in the front seat with an active airbag.
- Harness straps should be as snug as possible and the harness clip should be placed at armpit level.
- Young infants need to ride reclined to keep their airway open. The most a rear facing car seat should be reclined is 45 degrees.

CHOC Community Education offers FREE Child Seat Safety classes and a low cost car seat distribution program in English and Spanish. For more information or resources near you please call (714) 532-8887 or your local California Highway Patrol Office.