

## Child Passenger Safety

From 2008 to 2012, there were 55 (an average of 11 each year) motor vehicle occupant deaths to children ages 0 to 14 years. Another 402 (an average of 80 each year) were hospitalized for crash injuries. Some of these injuries were life changing, such as brain or spinal cord injury.

### Key Messages to Help Reduce Risks

- ◆ About 72 percent of car and booster seats are used incorrectly. This increases the risk of injury and death for the child using the seat (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).
- ◆ To reduce the risk of incorrect use, parents and caregivers need to read and follow all instruction manuals, and have the seat checked by a child passenger safety technician.
- ◆ A child safety seat costing about \$52 can save at least \$2,200 by preventing injuries. (Children's Safety Network – [Injury Prevention: What Works? A Summary of Cost-Outcome Analysis for Injury Prevention Programs \(2010 update\)](#)).
- ◆ While Washington State has a strong passenger safety law and relatively few deaths, more can be done to protect children of all ages in vehicles.
- ◆ The Washington Traffic Safety Commission, Washington State Patrol, Department of Transportation, and other traffic safety experts estimate 85 percent of traffic crashes are caused by human error – not roads, weather, or vehicle issues.

### Follow the law: Washington's Child Car Seat Law (RCW 46.61.687)

- ◆ Vehicle occupants of any age and size must be correctly restrained.
- ◆ The driver is responsible for assuring passengers under age 16 are correctly restrained.
- ◆ Children must ride in an appropriate car safety seat until age 8 or 4'9" tall-whichever comes first. Safety restraints must be installed and used according to vehicle and safety restraint manufacturer's instructions.
- ◆ At age 8 or 4'9" tall, children may ride using a seat belt **if it fits correctly**. If the seat belt does not fit properly, use a car seat until the seat belt fits. See correct fit of seatbelts for children, below.
- ◆ Children up to age 13 must ride in the back seat when it is practical to do so.

**NOTE:** Having groceries, sports gear, pets, or other things in the back seat is NOT a good reason for young children to ride in the front.

- ◆ When unsure about how to use a child restraint system, attend a child safety seat check inspection station or event – they are in many communities in Washington State.
- ◆ Check at [www.safekidswashington.org](http://www.safekidswashington.org) for an inspection site near you.
- ◆ For tips and video demonstrations about basic installation and fitting of car and booster seats, go to the NHTSA website, listed in Information and Resources below.

## Also

- ◆ The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends:
  - Children are five times safer if they stay in a rear-facing safety seat until age two or they reach the weight/height limits of the convertible car seat.
  - Children over age two (and/or have reached the rear-facing weight or height limits of the car seat), are safest in a forward-facing seat with a 5-point harness for as long as possible.
  - When children reach the weight or height limit of their forward-facing seat they need to ride in a belt-positioning booster seat until the adult seat belt fits them.
  - An adult seat belt fits when the child:
    - Sits all the way against the vehicle's back seat, AND
    - Knees bend at the edge of the vehicle seat, AND
    - Lap belt fits low across the upper thighs (not up on the belly), AND
    - Shoulder belt crosses between the neck and shoulder, AND
    - Sits comfortably in position for the whole trip.
  - When age 13 and riding in the front, slide the seat back as far as possible; and
  - Check for airbag warnings.

## More Tips

- ◆ Never buckle two children into one seat belt; in a crash they will collide violently with each other causing serious injury or death.
- ◆ Never hold a child on an adult lap, even if the seat belt is across both people; in a crash the child will be crushed under the weight of the adult.
- ◆ Just as it is safer to restrain people when traveling, the same is true for pets. It is very distracting and unsafe to have a loose pet in the vehicle or sitting on the driver's lap. There are seat belts for dogs and travel crates for all pets.

## Information and Resources

- ◆ American Automobile Association (AAA) Foundation [www.aaafoundation.org](http://www.aaafoundation.org)
- ◆ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [www.cdc.gov/ncipc](http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc)
- ◆ Injury & Violence Prevention Guide, Washington State, 2013 [Motor Vehicle-Related Injuries \(PDF\)](#)
- ◆ Insurance Institute for Highway Safety [www.iihs.org](http://www.iihs.org)
- ◆ National Highway Traffic Safety Administration [www.nhtsa.gov](http://www.nhtsa.gov)
- ◆ Safe Kids Washington [www.safekidswashington.org](http://www.safekidswashington.org)
- ◆ Safe Kids Worldwide [www.safekids.org](http://www.safekids.org)
- ◆ WA Child Passenger Safety Program [www.citybonneylake.org/childpassengersafety](http://www.citybonneylake.org/childpassengersafety)
- ◆ WA Traffic Safety Commission [www.wtsc.wa.gov](http://www.wtsc.wa.gov)

July 30, 2014