



American Academy of Pediatrics



DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™

Car Safety Seats — Common Questions

What If My Baby Is Born Prematurely?

Premature infants should be observed by a health care professional in their car safety seats while still in the hospital to make sure the reclined position does not cause low heart rate, low oxygen or breathing problems. If your baby needs to lie flat during travel, use a crash-tested car bed. Otherwise, use a rear-facing car safety seat without a tray shield. Shields often are too big and too far from the body to fit correctly. A small baby's face could hit the tray in a crash. If possible, an adult should ride in the back seat next to your baby to watch him closely.

What If My Baby Weighs More Than 20 Pounds But Is Not 1 Year Old Yet?

Many babies reach 20 pounds well before their first birthday. However, just because your baby weighs more than 20 pounds does not make her ready to ride facing forward. Use a convertible or infant-only seat that can be used rear-facing by children who weigh more than 20 pounds and keep your baby rear-facing at least until she has reached her first birthday.

What If My Child Has Special Health Care Needs?

Children with special health needs may have to use special restraint systems. Talk about this with your pediatrician. Information about transporting your child with special needs is available from the National Center for the Safe Transportation of Children with Special Health Care Needs at 1-800-620-0143 or by visiting its website at www.preventinjury.org. For more information and a list of car safety seats available for children with special needs, visit www.aap.org/healthtopics/carseatsafety.cfm.

What If My Car Has Air Bags?

All new cars come equipped with air bags. When used with seat belts, air bags work very well to protect teenagers and adults. However, air bags are very dangerous to children, particularly those riding in rear-facing car safety seats and to child passengers who are not properly positioned. If your car has a passenger air bag, infants in rear-facing seats must ride in the back seat. Even in a relatively low-speed crash, the air bag can inflate, strike the car safety seat, and cause serious brain and neck injury and death.

Toddlers who ride in forward-facing car safety seats also are at risk from air bag injuries. All children up to age 13 years are safest in the back seat. If you must put a child in the front seat, slide the vehicle seat back as far as it will go. Make sure your child is properly restrained for his

age and size and stays in the proper position at all times. This will help prevent the air bag from striking your child.

Air bag on/off switches can be used in the few cases in which an infant must ride in the front seat. Most families don't need to use the air bag on/off switch. Air bags that are turned off cannot protect other passengers riding in the front seat. Air bag on/off switches only should be used if all of the following are true:

- Your child has special health care needs.
- Your pediatrician recommends constant supervision of your child during travel.
- No other adult can ride in the back seat with your child.

On/off switches also must be used if you have a vehicle with no back seat or a back seat that is not made for passengers.

What If My Car Has Side Air Bags?

Side air bags improve safety for adults in side impact crashes. However, children who are seated near a side air bag may be at risk for serious injury. Read your vehicle owner's manual for recommendations that apply to your vehicle.

What If My Car Only Has Lap Belts in the Back Seat?

Lap belts work fine when installing infant-only, convertible and forward-facing car safety seats. They cannot be used with booster seats, and they are not the safest way to buckle older children. If your car only has lap belts, use a forward-facing car safety seat with a harness and higher weight limits. Other options are:

- Check with a car dealer or the manufacturer to see if shoulder belts can be installed.
- Use a travel vest (some can be used with lap belts).
- Consider buying another car with lap and shoulder belts in the back seat.

What If I Drive More Children Than Can Be Buckled Safely in the Back Seat?

Avoid having to drive more children than can be buckled safely in the back seat, especially if your car has passenger air bags. However, if necessary, a child in a forward-facing car safety seat with a harness may be the best choice to ride in front. This is because a child who is in a booster seat or using a regular seat belt can easily move out of position and be at greater risk for injuries from the air bag.

What Do I Need to Know If My Child Will Be Driven by Someone Else, Such as for Child Care or School?

If your child is being driven by someone else, make sure:

- The car safety seat your child will be using (whether supplied by you or by the school) is appropriate for your child and the vehicle used for transport.
- The person responsible for transporting your child knows how to install the car safety seat correctly.

Child care programs and schools should have written guidelines for transporting children. These guidelines should include the following:

- All drivers must have a valid driver's license. In some states, school bus drivers need to have a special type of license.
- Child-to-staff ratios for transport should meet or exceed those required for the classroom.
- Every child should be supervised during transport, either by school staff or a parent volunteer. This allows the driver to focus entirely on driving.
- School staff, teachers and drivers should be knowledgeable about what to do in an emergency, proper use of car safety seats and seat belts, and other safety requirements. For more information on written transportation guidelines for schools and child care programs, visit www.healthykids.us/chapters/transportation_main.htm and www.healthychildcare.org.

Can I Use a Car Safety Seat on an Airplane?

The Federal Aviation Administration and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend that when flying, children should be securely fastened in car safety seats until 4 years of age and then should be secured with the airplane seat belts. This will help keep them safe during takeoff and landing or in case of turbulence. Most infant, convertible and forward-facing seats are certified to be used on airplanes. Booster seats and travel vests are not. Check the label on your car safety seat and call the car safety seat manufacturer before you travel to be sure your seat is certified for use on an airplane. You also can consider using a restraint made only for use on airplanes and approved by the FAA.

Can I Use a Car Safety Seat That Was in a Crash?

If the car safety seat was in a moderate or severe crash, it needs to be replaced. If the crash was minor, the seat does not automatically need to be replaced. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration considers a crash to be minor if all of the following are true:

- The vehicle could be driven away from the crash.
- The vehicle door closest to the car safety seat was not damaged.
- No one in the vehicle was injured.
- The air bags did not go off.
- You can't see any damage to the car safety seat.

If you are unsure, call the manufacturer of the seat. See the resource section for manufacturer names and phone numbers.

What About Using a Used Car Safety Seat?

Avoid using used car safety seats, especially if bought from a yard sale or thrift shop because you won't know the seat's history. Never use a car safety seat that:

- Is too old. Look on the label for the date it was made. Many manufacturers recommend that car safety seats only be used for a certain number of years. Check with the manufacturer to find out how long the company recommends using their seat.
- Has any visible cracks in the frame of the seat.
- Does not have a label with the date of manufacture and model number. Without these, you cannot check to see if the seat has been recalled.
- Does not come with instructions. You need them to know how to use the seat. You can get a copy of the instruction manual by contacting the manufacturer or looking on the Internet.
- Is missing parts. Used car safety seats often come without important parts. Check with the manufacturer to make sure you can get the right parts.

- Is a shield booster. Although shield boosters are still around, the AAP recommends against their use. Major injuries have occurred to children in shield boosters. The only time shield boosters should be used is if the shield is removed and the seat is used with a lap and shoulder belt as previously described.
- Was recalled. You can find out by calling the manufacturer or by contacting the following:
 - Auto Safety Hot Line: Toll-free: 1-888-DASH-2-DOT (1-888-327-4236), from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. ET, Monday through Friday.
 - National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) www-odi.nhtsa.dot.gov/cars/problems/recalls/childseat.cfm.

If the seat has been recalled, be sure to follow the instructions to fix it or to get the parts you need. You also may get a registration card for future recall notices from the hotline.

Don't Leave Your Child Unattended in a Car Safety Seat

Children should never be left alone in or around a car whether they are in their car safety seats or not. Any of the following can happen when a child is left alone in or around a vehicle:

- The temperature in a vehicle can reach a deadly level in minutes, and the child can die of heat stroke.
- She can be strangled by power windows, sunroofs or accessories.
- She can knock the vehicle into gear, setting it in motion.
- She can be backed over when the vehicle backs up.

Don't leave your baby unattended in a car safety seat outside of the vehicle either. When your baby falls asleep in her car safety seat, it can be tempting to bring her inside and leave her alone in the seat, but this can be unsafe. Your baby can fall out of the seat, or the seat can fall over. The best place for your baby to sleep is on her back in a safe crib.