



## **Keeping Your Child Safe in a Car Seat**

### ***Is Your Infant Car Seat Installed Correctly?***

The sad truth is that 99 percent of infant cars seats are installed incorrectly. Only one or two out of every 100 infant seats checked at local car seat inspections are likely to pass without safety adjustments needed. The pass rate is higher for toddlers riding in forward facing seats, with about 15 out of 100 correctly installed. Unfortunately, most parents don't even know they're doing anything wrong. Studies show that 96 percent of parents believe their seats are being used and installed correctly.

Safe installation and proper use are very important - there is no such thing as "close enough." Car crashes are the leading cause of unintentional injury to babies and children - ahead of falls, burns and choking. Though no safety system is 100 percent effective in all crashes, many of these deaths and injuries could be prevented with the proper use of child restraints. Car seats are about 70 percent effective for reducing fatalities and hospitalization for babies when correctly used.

Child safety advocates recommend that every parent first carefully read the infant seat installation instructions and the vehicle owner's manual section on car seats. Then attend a car seat safety clinic event. Certified Child Passenger Safety Technicians and trained volunteers will check for correct installation, damage, recalls, and size and age appropriateness. Each seat inspection takes about 30 minutes.

Legacy Emanuel Children's Hospital sponsors several car seat safety clinics a year in the Portland metropolitan area. They also have printed information available about the proper use of child safety seats for premature babies, normal newborns, toddlers and school-age children. If you are interested in obtaining this information, please call Sandy Nipper at 503-413-4443.

In addition, the Child Safety Seat Resource Center sponsors car seat clinics. To find a clinic in your area, go to [www.actsoregon.org](http://www.actsoregon.org). For other questions, call their help line at 503-656-7207 or 1-800-772-1315.

### ***Selecting a Car Seat Specifically for a New Baby***

By Oregon law, all children under four years old and under 40 pounds must be properly secured in an approved child safety seat. That's because safety seats save children's lives-if they are used properly. The choice of car seat depends on the child's age, weight, height and behavior. Car seats are designed for kids of average sizes. Your own child's size and needs may vary from this.

The best seat is one that fits your baby and fits in your vehicle. A seat given to you as a gift may not be the best for your baby. Beware of used car seats; they may have hidden safety problems.

Make sure the car seat is convenient to install and adjust, so you will use it correctly on every ride. Exchange it if it doesn't fit.

There are three types of car seats specifically designed for infants:

- **Infant-only car seat**—A small seat for rear-facing use only. Most fit babies only up to 20-22 pounds. It's convenient for carrying a small baby to and from the car. Some models have a base that stays installed in the car.
- **Convertible car seat**—This seat can be used rear-facing for an infant, then forward-facing when the child is older than 1 year of age. A seat with a harness, not a shield, fits a newborn baby best.
- **Car bed**—For premature babies or other babies with medical conditions requiring them to lie flat (e.g., breathing problems).

### ***Bringing Your New Baby Home Safely***

Remember to plan ahead. When you start those childbirth education classes and it's still months before you deliver, it's not too early to locate and attend a car seat inspection clinic.

When you've finally delivered and are ready to bring home your new bundle of joy, here are a few tips to make sure baby fits properly in the infant car seat:

- Infants under one year always ride facing the rear of the car with the car seat at a 45 degree angle.
- Dress your baby in clothes with legs so the crotch strap can go between his/her legs.
- Adjust the harness to fit snugly. Avoid using thick blankets, a heavy snowsuit or a bunting under the straps. These make it impossible to get the harness tight enough to hold the baby in a crash. To keep the baby warm, buckle the harness first, then tuck a blanket on top.
- Put the harness straps in the lowest slots. Straps should be in slots closest to or just below your baby's shoulders in the rear-facing position.
- Pad the sides of the car seat so your new baby sits comfortably. Tuck rolled blankets or towels along each side your baby. If he/she slumps, add a rolled washcloth between his/her crotch and the crotch strap. There is no need to buy a separate head pad, because it can make the straps too loose. A pad that comes with the seat is okay.

### ***As Your Baby Grows***

- Keep harness straps in the lowest slots until your baby's shoulders reach the higher slots.

- If your baby uses an infant-only seat, move him/her into a convertible seat when his/her head is 1 inch from the top of the back of the car seat or when he/she reaches the weight limit of the seat.
- Use a convertible seat that can be used in the rear facing position up to 30-35 pounds (check the label) until he/she reaches at least 1 year old. Even at 1, riding facing the rear protects the baby's spine

When your baby outgrows his/her infant car seat and you're ready to upgrade to a new car seat, remember that the choice of car seat depends on the child's age, weight, height and behavior. Car seats are designed for kids of average sizes. Your own child's size and needs may vary from this.

Each time you get a new car seat, remember to first carefully read the seat installation instructions and the vehicle owner's manual section on car seats. Then attend a car seat safety clinic event. Certified Child Passenger Safety Technicians and trained volunteers will check for correct installation, damage, recalls, and size and age appropriateness. Each seat inspection takes about 30 minutes.

To find a clinic in your area, go to the Child Safety Seat Resource Center ([www.actsoregon.org](http://www.actsoregon.org)). For other questions, call their help line at 503-656-7207 or 1-800-772-1315.

### ***Keep Older Children Safe with Booster Seats***

Children up to age 4 and 40 pounds are safest traveling in child safety seats with a harness system. Did you know that as of January 1, 2002, Oregon law required children between 40 and 60 pounds or are between 4 and 6 years of age to use booster seats when traveling in motor vehicles.

Booster seats are made for older children when they are too big for a car seat, but still not big enough to use the adult seat belts. The booster seat sits on the seat of the vehicle and raises a child up so the car's seat belt will fit properly.

Booster seats increase a child's chance of surviving a car crash by 36 percent. In a crash, a child who is too small for the seat belt can be ejected and/or receive serious neck, spinal cord and internal abdominal injuries from an incorrectly positioned belt. Booster seats keep seat belts where they do the most good.

Start to use a booster seat when your child has outgrown the forward facing car seat with a harness. This happens when the shoulders are above the top set of strap slots or when the child weighs about 40 pounds or when their ears reach the top of the seat back.

### ***Child Safety Seat Links***

**Child Safety Seat Resource Center:** [www.childsafetyseat.org](http://www.childsafetyseat.org)

A non-profit organization that provides technical assistance and information about

correct use of car seats, as well as maintaining a statewide calendar of car seat clinics.

**National Highway Transportation Safety Administration Child Passenger Safety:** <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/childps/index.cfm>

This site provides a list of new child restraints and features; new vehicle and Child Safety features; proper tips for installing and using safety restraints.

**SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A.:** <http://www.carseat.org>

A California-based organization with valuable information on child passenger safety including educational materials, recall information and answers to technical questions.

**Daimler Chrysler Fit For A Kids Program** <http://www.fitforakid.org>

Daimler Chrysler Child Safety Seat Service

**American Association of Pediatrics:** <http://www.aap.org/family/carseatguide.htm>

2001 Family Shopping Guide to Car Seats

**National SAFE KIDS Campaign:** <http://www.safekids.org>

The national organization dedicated to the prevention of unintentional childhood injury has information on a variety of issues, including traffic safety, drowning, burns, falls, poisoning, firearms, sports, and toys.

**Oregon Department of Transportation - Transportation Safety Division:**

<http://www.odot.state.or.us/transafety>

Home page for the Transportation Safety Division with information on Safe Communities, Bicyclist Safety, Commercial Vehicles, Drivers Education, Impaired Driving, Occupant Protection and much more.

**Ford Boost America! Program:** [www.boostamerica.org](http://www.boostamerica.org)

---

*Note: This information is designed for educational purposes only and is not to be used as a substitute for professional medical advice.*

*Legacy Health System, a non-profit organization, includes Emanuel Hospital & Health Center, Emanuel Children's Hospital, Good Samaritan Hospital & Medical Center, Meridian Park Hospital, Mount Hood Medical Center, Salmon Creek Hospital, Visiting Nurse Association, Legacy Clinics and CareMark/Managed HealthCare Northwest PPO.*