

Child Passenger Safety: Changing Laws- Choosing Best Practice- Shaping New Norms

Changing Laws

California Child Passenger Safety Law

As of January 2012, a child safety seat must be used to age 8, unless the child is 4 foot 9 inches or taller.

Child Passenger Restraints

	<u>Old law</u>	<u>New law</u>
Age.....	under 6	under 8
Height	no requirement	under 4'9"
Backseat until	6 years old	8 yrs old

For a detailed description of the new law, please visit www.leginfo.ca.gov

Choosing Best Practice

Earlier this year the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) published new guidelines on best practice in child passenger safety, considered the "gold standard:

- restraining a child in a belt positioning booster until they reach a height of 4 foot 9 inches tall.
- children remaining in the rear seat until their 13th birthday.

Why are these gold standards? Seat belts are designed for adults 4 foot 9 inches or taller. A belt positioning booster seat places the child and the seat belt in the correct position to provide maximum protection in a crash, protecting vital organs, as well as the head and spine. The back seat is the safest seat in a vehicle, reducing the

occurrence of injury by 40% (NHTSA). Also, children often do not meet the size and weight recommended by vehicle manufactures for protection in the case of air bag deployment.

These recommendations are proven effective. Research has demonstrated that use of a belt positioning booster seat reduces a child's risk of injury by 59%. National studies evaluating the effect of legislation demonstrate that children are 39% less likely to be injured in a crash in states with required safety seats through the age of 8 (Children's Hospital of Philadelphia 2007). Comparative studies demonstrate a four-fold increase in appropriate usage after passage of legislation requiring booster seats (Indiana University,2006).

Brief History of Child Passenger Safety Norms

1962	1st child seat designed in U.S.
1970's	Medical community advocates for car seat legislation
1978	TN passes 1st state law requiring use of child safety seats
1985	Final state passes child passenger safety law
1998	Child Passenger Safety Act funds tech training, inspection and car seat distribution programs
2000	1st booster seat laws passed in WA and CA
Now	Booster seats req. in CA to age 8

Shaping New Norms

Seat belt and child safety restraint norms have changed in a generation, and some people still haven't adapted. So how do we encourage parents to accept the new norms, and encourage their children to accept a booster seat so they can wear their seatbelt comfortably and safely?

Here and on the attached sheet are some steps you can share with parents. It is important for medical practitioners to play a role in encouraging and modeling this safe behavior for patients.

The 5 Step Seat Belt Test

- Can the child sit all the way back against the auto seat?
- Do the child's knees bend comfortably at the edge of the seat?
- Does the belt cross the shoulder between the neck and arm?
- Is the lap belt as low as possible, touching the thighs?
- Can the child remain seated like this for the entire trip?

For more information, contact Mary Beth Moran, Program Manager, mbmoran@rchsd.org, 858-576-1700, ext. 3547
Sue Cox, Director of Trauma Services, scox@rchsd.org, ext. 4010
Cheri Fidler, Director, Center for Healthier Communities, cfidler@rchsd.org, ext. 4389

from the Center for Healthier Communities and
Department of Trauma Services at Rady Children's Hospital

Alert: New Child Passenger Safety Law

January 2012



The Law

In California, children under 8 years old **MUST**:

- ride in a child passenger safety seat (younger children) or booster seat (unless they are taller than 4'9")
- ride in the back seat

For a detailed description of the new law, please visit www.leginfo.ca.gov

The Why

Seat belts are designed for adults 4 foot 9 inches or taller. Booster seats put the child where the seat belt fits right so it can do its job: protecting vital organs, as well as the head and spine.

According to national safety statistics, the back seat is the safest seat in a vehicle, with 40% fewer injuries in accidents. Often children are smaller than the size recommended by vehicle manufacturers to sit where air bags deploy.

The How

Do the Seat Belt Test (try to make it a game):

- Can the child sit all the way back against the auto seat?
- Do the child's knees bend comfortably at the edge of the seat?
- Does the belt cross the shoulder between the neck and arm?
- Is the lap belt as low as possible, touching the thighs?
- Can the child remain seated like this for the entire trip?

If they don't "pass" with the seat belt alone, try again with a booster seat. Point out how much more comfortable it is with the seat—make them feel privileged to have the seat, not stuck with it. And comment on how much better they will be able to see out the window!

Let your child shop for the booster seat with you, choosing something they find appealing and comfortable. That way they will be more likely to use it happily. Don't forget—different cars will "fit" the child differently—SUVs have deeper seats than economy sedans. Have a safe solution for every car.

Bottom line—you want them to be safe, every ride, every car!