

News Release
For Immediate Release

The Importance of Using Booster Seats

Unfortunately, seat belts do not come in one-size-fits-all. In fact, the seat belt that is designed to save an adult's life in a crash does not fit a young child. And, the poor fit of the seat belt can actually cause serious injuries or even death during a crash. Many parents are under the impression that a child can be moved to the vehicle seat belt system when they have outgrown the weight limits of their child safety seat. Most conventional forward-facing child safety seats have a 5-point harness system that can be used until 40 pounds. **However, most children weigh 40 pounds long before they are tall enough to fit in the vehicle lap/shoulder belt.**

Children do not fit well in the vehicle lap/shoulder belts that were designed for adults who are at least 4 feet 9 inches tall. Instead of fitting properly over the lower hips, the lap belt rides over the soft tissues of the abdomen and can cause severe injury or death. The shoulder portion of the belt hits the child's neck or face instead of lying flat across the chest. This causes many children to place the shoulder belt behind their back, leaving them with no upper body protection. A booster seat 'boosts' the child up so the lap/shoulder belt will fit correctly and provide protection in a crash.

Dee Lee Smith, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Agent, Gregg County reminds parents that correctly using a booster seat can protect a child from being thrown around the vehicle or being totally ejected in a crash. In a crash, children who are incorrectly restrained by a lap/shoulder belt are likely to sustain serious injuries to internal organs as well as the head and spinal cord. In fact, these abdominal and spinal injuries are medically referred to as "Seat Belt Syndrome."

Motor vehicle crashes continue to be the leading cause of death for children ages three and up. Child safety seats, including boosters, have been proven to be effective in preventing injuries and deaths, yet in 2011, 41% of Texas booster-seat age children killed in motor vehicle crashes were unrestrained. Studies show that booster seats can reduce the risk of injury by 59 percent for children ages 4-7, but children in this age group are the least likely to be properly restrained. Surveys conducted in Texas in 2012 by the Texas A&M Transportation Institute found that only 33.4 percent of our booster seat age children were restrained.

The law in Texas requires children under age 8, unless taller than 4' 9" to be in a child restraint system according to the manufacturer's instructions. According to the law, an 8 year old can legally ride in the seat belt, but only a small percentage of 8 year olds are 4'9". The average child reaches 4'9" at age 11! Best practice is to keep the child in a booster seat until the lap/shoulder belts fits.

The injury rate and high costs associated with medical care and lost productivity for families is huge. Booster seats are an affordable solution to protecting children in the 4-8+ age group. The cost of booster seats is low—generally between \$15-\$40. It is estimated by Safe Kids Worldwide that a \$30 booster seat generates \$2,000 in benefit to society from reduced health-care expenses. Booster seats offer a low-cost solution to a high-cost problem.

When is your child ready for the seat belt?

Take the Five Step Test

1. Does the child sit all the way back against the auto seat?
2. Do the child's knees bend comfortably at the edge of the vehicle?
3. Does the belt cross the shoulder between the neck and arm?

4. Is the lap belt as low as possible, touching the thighs?
5. Can the child stay seated like this for the whole trip?

If you answered 'no' to any of these questions, your child needs a booster seat to make both the shoulder belt and the lap belt fit right for the best crash protection. Your child will be more comfortable, too!

Source: *SafetyBeltSafe, U.S.A.*, www.carseat.org

Call Dee Lee Smith at 903-236-8428 for a free child safety seat inspection, need a booster seat for your child, or visit <http://buckleup.tamu.edu> to find a certified child passenger safety technician in your area.