

Child Passenger Safety: Fact Sheet

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Overview. Motor vehicle injuries are the leading cause of death among children in the U.S. (CDC 2006). But many of these deaths can be prevented. Placing children in age- and size-appropriate restraint systems reduces serious and fatal injuries by more than half (NHTSA 2006b).

Occurrence and Consequences

- In the United States during 2005, 1,451 children ages 14 years and younger died as occupants in motor vehicle crashes, and approximately 203,000 were injured. That's an average of 4 deaths and 556 injuries each day (NHTSA 2006b).
- Of the children ages 0 to 14 years who were killed in motor vehicle crashes during 2005, nearly half were unrestrained (NHTSA 2006b).

Risk Factors

- One out of four of all occupant deaths among children ages 0 to 14 years involve a drinking driver. More than two-thirds of these fatally injured children were riding with a drinking driver (Shults 2004).
- Restraint use among young children often depends upon the driver's restraint use. Almost 40% of children riding with unbelted drivers were themselves unrestrained (Cody et al. 2002).
- Child restraint systems are often used incorrectly. One study found that 72% of nearly 3,500 observed child restraint systems were misused in a way that could be expected to increase a child's risk of injury during a crash (NHTSA 2006c).

Prevention

- Child safety seats reduce the risk of death in passenger cars by 71% for infants, and by 54% for toddlers ages 1 to 4 years (NHTSA 2006b).
- The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration recommends booster seats for children until they are at least 8 years of age or 4'9" tall (NHTSA 2006d).
- For children 4 to 7 years, booster seats reduce injury risk by 59% compared to safety belts alone (Durbin et al. 2003).
- All children ages 12 years and younger should ride in the back seat. This eliminates the injury risk of deployed front passenger-side airbags and places children in the safest part of the vehicle in the event of a crash. Overall, for children less than 16 years, riding in the back seat is associated with a 40% reduction in the risk of serious injury. Appropriately restrained children ages 13 to 15 who sit in the front seat are not at increased risk for injury (Durbin et al. 2005). To learn more about effective interventions to increase child safety seat use, visit CDC's [Motor Vehicle Occupant Safety](#) page.

Content Source: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Division of Unintentional Injury Prevention. Page last modified: August 30, 2007.