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New Recommendations Prompt the California Office of Traffic Safety to Urge Parents and Caregivers to Get Their Car Seats Inspected

SACRAMENTO, CA – With 70-90 percent of child safety seats improperly installed, the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) urges parents and caregivers to have their children’s car seats checked during National Seat Check Child Passenger Safety Week, Sept. 18-24, 2011. Certified child passenger safety technicians from the California Highway Patrol (CHP), police department and health department have trained Child Passenger Safety Technicians to aid in teaching parents and child caregivers the proper way to use safety seats. Additionally, National Seat Check Saturday is on Sept. 24, with many communities planning special events to bring awareness and to educate people on how to protect our ‘precious cargo’ by properly installing child safety seats.

“The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recently updated car seat recommendations for children under the age of 13,” said Christopher Murphy, Director of OTS. “We want to help you do all you can to best protect your child when traveling. During Child Passenger Safety Week, we are encouraging all parents and caregivers to have their car seat checked by a certified technician. When it comes to the safety of your child, there is no room for mistakes.”

In motor vehicle crashes, properly installed car seats reduce the risk of fatal injury by 71 percent for children younger than one and by 54 percent for children aged one to four, according to data collected by NHTSA. In 2009 alone, 84 children aged 12 or younger were killed in California in motor vehicle traffic crashes. Among those, 54 percent were unrestrained. Many of these tragedies could have been prevented if the children were in the right restraint for their age and size. For maximum child passenger safety, parents and caregivers should visit their local inspection station to ensure their child's car seat is used properly

The updated recommendations emphasize how important it is to keep children in each restraint type for as long as possible before moving them to the next type:

Birth – 12 months

For the best possible protection, a child younger than one should always ride in a rear-facing car seat. There are different types of rear-facing car seats: infant-only, convertible and 3-in-1. Infant-only seats can only be used rear-facing, while convertible and 3-in-1 car seats typically have higher

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height and weight limits for the rear-facing position, allowing you to keep your child rear-facing for a longer period of time.

1 – 3 years

A child should remain in a rear-facing car seat until he or she reaches the top height or weight limit allowed by your car seat's manufacturer. This may result in many children remaining in rear-facing seats until the age of two or older. Once a child outgrows the rear-facing car seat, he or she is ready to travel in a forward-facing car seat with a harness.

4 – 7 years

Keep your child in a forward-facing car seat with a harness until he or she reaches the top height or weight limit allowed by your car seat's manufacturer. Once your child outgrows the forward-facing car seat with a harness, keep them riding in the back seat, but move them into a booster seat.

8 – 12 years

Keep your child in a booster seat until he or she is big enough to fit properly in a seat belt. This means that the lap belt must lay snugly across the upper thighs, not the stomach, and the shoulder belt should lay snugly across the shoulder and chest and not over the neck or face.

Remember:

- Select a car seat based on your child's age and size, and choose a seat that fits in your vehicle and use it every time.
- Always refer to your specific car seat manufacturer's instructions; read the vehicle owner's manual on how to install the car seat using the seat belt or LATCH system and check height and weight limits.
- To maximize safety, keep your child in the car seat for as long as possible, as long as the child fits within the manufacturer's height and weight requirements.
- Keep your child in the back seat at least through age 12.

California law requires that children be properly secured in the back seat in a child restraint system until they are at least six years old or 60 pounds. Additionally, children under age 16 must be properly secured in either a child restraint system or seat belt.

Law enforcement officers issue thousands of citations annually for child safety seat violations throughout California. According to the Office of Traffic Safety, on the first offense, a child passenger violation will cost a minimum of \$445 with penalty assessments. A second or subsequent offense carries a cost of \$1,025. If the parent is not in the vehicle, the driver gets the ticket.

For more information on child passenger safety go to www.ots.ca.gov and click the "Child Passenger Safety" button.

To find a local car seat event, visit:

- "Locate a Child Seat Fitting Station" at <http://www.nhtsa.gov/Safety/CPS>
- <http://www.safekidsweb.org/events/events.asp>
- "Office Locator" at www.chp.ca.gov

For live updates follow [@childseatsafety](https://twitter.com/childseatsafety) on Twitter or join the community of parents, advocates and safety experts on <http://www.facebook.com/childpassengersafety>.