



Feature Column

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Keeping Your Hometown Healthy

Buckle Up!

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Traveling by car is a way of life for most people, with adults and their children spending a great amount of time on the road. The new school year has begun and, since we're always in such a hurry, do we really know if our children are buckled up properly?

It is estimated that approximately 85 to 95 percent of children who are placed in child safety seats and booster seats are not properly restrained. Using a car seat correctly makes a big difference. Even the "safest" seat may not protect your child in a crash unless it is used correctly. The Arkansas SAFE KIDS Coalition and the American Academy of Pediatrics would like to offer you a "One-Minute Car Seat Safety Check-Up." So, take a minute to check to be sure.

1. Does your car have a passenger side air bag?

- The safest place for children under age 13 to ride is in the back seat.
- An infant in a rear-facing seat should NEVER be placed in the front seat of a vehicle that has a passenger air bag.
- If an older child must ride in the front seat, move the vehicle seat as far back from the dashboard (and air bag) as possible and buckle the child properly. If the child must ride in the front seat, as in a pickup truck, you may be able to disable the air bag.

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2. Is your child facing the right way for both weight and age?

- Infants should ride facing the back of the car until they have reached at least 12 months AND weigh at least 20 pounds. Many convertibles seats can rear-face up to 30 or 35 pounds. The longer a child can ride rear facing, the safer they are.
- A child who weighs over 20 pounds AND is older than 12 months may face forward.

3. Has your child grown too tall for the convertible or forward-facing seat or has your child reached 40 pounds?

- Use a belt-positioning booster seat, with a lap and shoulder belt, to help protect your child until she is big enough to use a seat belt properly, usually 4'8" to 4'10" tall.
- Shield boosters, used only with lap belts, are not safe for children over 40 pounds. Children under 40 pounds should use a convertible or forward-facing seat. Shield boosters should only be used without the shield with a lap/shoulder belt.

4. Have you tried the car seat in your vehicle?

- Not all car seats fit in all vehicles. When the car seat is installed, be sure it does not move more than 1" side-to-side or toward the front of the car. Refer to the section on car seats in your car owner's manual.

5. Is the seat belt in the right place and pulled tight?

- Run the seat belt through the correct path (check your instructions to make sure), kneel in the seat to press it down, and pull the belt TIGHT, making sure the belt locks in place.
- A convertible seat has two different belt paths, one for infants and one for toddlers.
- Check the owner's manual for your car to see if you need to use a locking clip or a tether to keep the safety seat secure.

6. Is the harness snug; does it stay on your child's shoulders?

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- The shoulder straps of the car seat go in the lowest slots for infants riding backward and in the highest slots for children facing forward.
- The chest clip should be placed at armpit level to keep the harness straps on the shoulders. Harnesses should fit snugly against your child's body. If you can "pinch" the harness straps at the child's collarbone, the straps are too loose. Check the instructions on how to adjust the straps.

7. Do you have the instructions for the car seat?

- Follow them and keep them with the car seat. You will need them again as your child gets bigger. If you do not have the instructions for your car seat, call the 1-800 number listed on the side of the seat for a replacement set of instructions.
- Register the car seat. It will be important in case your car seat is recalled.

8. Has your child's car seat been recalled?

- Call the Auto Safety Hotline at 1-888-327-4236 or go to www.nhtsa.gov for a list of recalled seats that need repair. Be sure to make any necessary repairs to your car seat.

9. Has your child's car seat been in a crash?

- If so, it may have been weakened and should not be used, even if it looks all right. Call the car seat manufacturer if you have questions about the safety of your seat.

For the safety of your child, please take the extra time to properly install your child's car seat.

And by the way, make it a family thing; buckle yourself in, too. Watch for free clinics on child passenger safety seats in your neighborhood. For more information, please contact Virginia Lancaster, coordinator of the Arkansas SAFE KIDS Coalition, Arkansas Department of Health at (501) 661-2278. The Arkansas SAFE KIDS Coalition is co-sponsored by the Arkansas Department of Health and Arkansas Children's Hospital.

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