

## **CHILD PASSENGER SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS – Q & A's**

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**Question:** The American Academy of Pediatrics revised its position and now recommends keeping children in rear-facing restraints until they are two years old. Is NHTSA recommending the same thing?

**Answer:** NHTSA's recommendations are consistent with the American Academy of Pediatrics advice to keep children rear-facing as long as they fit within the height and weight limits of the car seat. This may result in many children riding rear-facing to age two or older.

**Question:** Why did NHTSA update their recommendations?

**Answer:** NHTSA's previous recommendations took into consideration the car seats and booster seats that were available at the time. Additional products have become available that accommodate children to higher weights, which allows for children to continue to ride rear-facing longer, restrained forward-facing with a harness longer or restrained in a booster seat longer as well.

**Question:** What would you say is the most significant change you've made to your recommendations?

**Answer:** Our new recommendations are categorized according to the child's age as opposed to the child's weight and the type of child restraint, which was how we had broken it out previously. We felt the age breakdown would be more useful to parents and caregivers and make it easier for them to follow to determine which restraint type would be most appropriate for their children. Another important concept we want to share with parents is how important it is to keep children in each restraint type for as long as possible before moving them to the next type. For example: keep kids in boosters for as long as possible before moving them into an adult seat belt.

**Question:** Do the new recommendations for babies mean I shouldn't place my child forward-facing even if he/she is over twenty pounds and a year?

**Answer:** Our best practice recommendation would be to keep your child rear-facing for as long as possible according to the manufacturer's instructions for your particular car seat. The rear-facing position reduces stresses to the neck and spinal cord and this is particularly important for growing babies. But, remember, the most important thing is for all children to be correctly restrained at all times when in a motor vehicle.

**Question:** If rear-facing is so important, why don't we keep our children rear-facing longer, like they do in Sweden and other countries?

**Answer:** There are many differences between our safety standards and the child restraint standards of other countries, including how they are tested as well as the types of dummies that are used in the testing process. Now that we have more child restraints available that go to higher weights, children in this country can be kept rear-facing for a longer period of time.

**Question:** Why go through the extra cost of purchasing a booster seat when my child seems ready for the seat belt in the car?

**Answer:** Some parents may choose not to purchase a booster seat because they believe the vehicle's seat belts alone are adequate for their child. However, the vehicle seat belt system is designed for an adult's body, not a child and most likely will not properly fit a child. A booster is made to be used with the vehicle's seat belt and provides important adjustments to make the lap and shoulder seat belt fit better and provides more comfort.

**Question:** What do you mean by proper fit?

**Answer:** For a lap and shoulder belt to fit properly, the lap portion must be placed snugly over the upper thighs, not the abdomen. The shoulder belt should be snug across the shoulder and chest and should not cross the neck or face.

**Question:** What kinds of injuries can occur if the seat belt doesn't fit properly?

**Answer:** In the event of a crash, if the lap belt is across the belly or other soft tissue area, serious injuries can occur to the spleen or other internal organs. Similarly, if the shoulder belt is in the child's face, the child may be tempted to put it behind their back or under their arm, which could cause serious internal injuries from head, neck and other injuries as well as rib fractures and complications. Remember, you want the seat belt over the strong parts of the body (bones)

**Question:** What about children with special needs?

**Answer:** Safe transportation for many children with special health care needs can be provided by using a standard child restraint, rather than a special adaptive one. However, there are many conditions where children do require specially adapted restraints and we recommend contacting a local technician [www.nhtsa.gov]. Also check out [www.preventinjury.org](http://www.preventinjury.org), a resource from Indiana University School of Medicine on special health care needs.]

**Question:** If parents follow these guidelines they could end up purchasing several car seats over the course of a child's life – right?

**Answer:** Not necessarily. For example, there are now convertible car seats that can accommodate children from birth through 65 pounds, and a few even higher to 80 pounds.

**Question:** After a while, all these car seats look the same, how do I know which one is best for my child?

**Answer:** The 'best' car seat is the one that fits your child, fits your vehicle and is one you will use every time your child is in the car. Deciding which car seat to buy, though, can be difficult. First, read our recommendations for the type of restraint you should have for your child. Second, check out our Ease of Use rating system at [www.nhtsa.gov](http://www.nhtsa.gov)] and the AAP's Shopping Guide to get more detailed information on the car seat that fits your category. When you decide on the one or ones you are interested in, many retail stores will let you try it out in your vehicle before you purchase. You can also locate a certified CPS technician to assist you at [www.nhtsa.dot.gov](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov) REMEMBER, always read both the child restraint manual and the vehicle instructions for guidance on how to install.

**Question:** Some booster seat instructions state that you can use them when your child reaches 30 pounds, do you recommend that?

**Answer:** Our best practice recommendation is to keep your child in a car seat with a harness for as long as your child fits within the height and weight requirements.