

“FOCUS ON CHILD PASSENGER SAFETY”

There are many things that can be done to curtail the problem of unrestrained and improperly restrained children. Parents should understand that a child needs a safety seat that is appropriate for the child’s age and weight. It is important for parents to read and follow their vehicle owner’s manual and safety seat instructions.

Never place a rear-facing infant seat in the front seat of a vehicle with a passenger-side air bag. Children 12 and under should always ride in the back seat for safety. Children too large for child safety seats and booster seats should always wear both lap and shoulder belts.

Remember the ABC’s of child passenger safety: Air Bag Safety, Buckle Everyone, Children Ride in Back..

Air bags are standard equipment in almost all new cars and are designed to supplement the protection provided by safety belts in frontal crashes. Starting with model year 1999, federal safety standards require that all new passenger cars and light trucks be equipped with both driver and passenger-side air bags. As of September 1, 1998, air bags have saved more than 3,400 people. While air bags have a good overall safety record, they pose several risks for children.

An infant in a rear-facing safety seat must never be placed in the front seat of a motor vehicle with a passenger-side air bag. During a forward impact, the rapidly inflating air bag could strike the safety seat with enough force to seriously injure or kill the infant. Infants less than one year of age and under 20 pounds must ride in a rear-facing safety seat placed in the back seat of the vehicle, especially if the vehicle is equipped with a passenger-side air bag.

Forward-facing safety seats, as used with toddlers and older children, typically place children several inches closer to the dashboard than the normal adult seating position. Therefore, the safest practice is to place all child safety seats in the back seat of the vehicle. If it is absolutely necessary to place a forward-facing safety seat in the front of a vehicle with a passenger-side air bag, the vehicle seat should be adjusted as far back as possible from the dashboard.

Air bags pose special hazards for any children who ride unrestrained or incorrectly restrained in the front seat. Like all occupants, children should always be properly restrained in safety seats or safety belts. Unfortunately, surveys indicate that as many as 35 percent of young children ride unrestrained. Pre-crash braking may throw an unrestrained child against the dashboard at or near the passenger air bag location. When this happens, the inflating air bag and its casing cover can violently effect the out-of-place child with such force that it can injure or even kill the child. The safest place for all children is correctly restrained in the back seat of the vehicle.

To ensure that your children ride safely, remember these rules:

- The back seat is the safest place for children of any age to ride.
- Never place an infant in the front seat of a car equipped with a passenger-side air bag.
- Infants must always ride in the back seat facing the rear of the car.
- Make sure everyone is buckled up. Unbuckled occupants can be hurt or killed by an air bag.

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