

The Family Road Trip: Travelling Safely With Your Children...

Summer is a favourite time to take that long awaited family vacation and for most this means travelling by road. Unfortunately not all travel goes as planned and the unexpected can happen. Did you know that in Canada car crashes are the leading cause of injury and death for children? So before heading out on your great adventure make sure your family is properly secured in the vehicle. For young children this means having them sit in a car or booster seat.

Newborns and infants should travel in a rear-facing car seat until they meet the weight (minimally 22 pounds) and height limits specified by the manufacturer and are able to walk unassisted. While the law in some provinces state that children can move to a forward-facing car seat at one year of age, many injury prevention and car seat safety groups recommend delaying this move until the child is about two.

Mounting evidence shows that for this age group, rear-facing car seats are 75 percent more protective and the added time allows the child to learn to walk with more confidence and independence, an important fact to consider when moving the child to the next stage of child passenger safety.

Parents know that children often fall asleep in their car seats when travelling, however not all are aware that newborns and infants under one month of age are potentially at risk for breathing problems as their heads can flop forward due to the lack of strength in their necks. While rear-facing car seats are made to reduce this risk, it is still possible, so taking very young infants out of their car seats with a break scheduled every hour is recommended.

When a child meets the requirements to progress to a forward-facing car seat, he should continue to do so until he reaches at least 40 pounds and is developmentally ready (meaning is able to sit and stay in his car seat during the entire trip). The 5 point harness system with a forward-facing car seat is safer for a child if he is not mature enough to move to a booster seat. Therefore, parents may choose to buy a car seat with a higher weight and height range so that it can be used for a longer period of time. In addition forward-facing car seats must be tightly tethered to an anchor point in the vehicle in order to prevent the top of the car seat from moving forward too much during a collision.

At about 4 years of age and when a child weighs at least 40 pounds and is mature enough to stay seated in a car seat, he is able to move into a booster seat. Booster seats are known to protect children from injury in a crash and are about 60% more effective than seat belts. The reason for this is that seat belts are made to fit an adult body and are too big for a child's smaller one. Using a booster seat helps to lift the child up so that the seat belt fits better over the middle of the child's chest and shoulder and

correctly rides low and snug across the hips. Currently in Canada, 8 provinces including NL, require that children under 9 years of age be restrained in a booster seat.

Children 9 years and older, whose height is minimally 4 feet, 9 inches and weigh 80 pounds, can use the seat belts in the vehicle provided:

- the child is able to sit all the way back in the seat
- the knees are able to bend comfortably at the edge of the seat
- the shoulder belt is able to lay across the collarbone and not ride up the neck or slip off the shoulder
- the lap belt sits low across the tops of the thigh and does not ride up over the belly and
- the child even in sleep, can remain seated like this for the entire trip.

Installing a car or booster seat can seem quite challenging but there is help. The Family Resource Centres in partnership with the Western Injury Prevention Coalition offer a child passenger safety program to families of the west coast of Newfoundland. These centers have technicians and instructors who are certified to national standards through the Child Passenger Safety Association of Canada and can help parents learn how to correctly install a car/booster seat and how to seat a child safely. Parents can obtain this service by contacting a Family Resource Center in a community closest to them.

Having your children properly secured in a car or booster seat makes for a safer road trip and happy memories.

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