

Keeping kids safe is every parent's priority: Make sure you're using car seats correctly

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Few would argue that parents don't want to keep their children safe at all times. The problem is that keeping them safe in vehicles isn't as easy as it might appear. Nationally, it is reported that three out of four car seats are not used correctly. For a car seat to best protect your child it must be one that fits your child, your vehicle and is one that you will use correctly every time you travel.

Choose the right seat for your child's age and size and choose a seat that will fit properly in your vehicle.

Children are at greater risk than adults in a vehicle crash. In fact, motor vehicle crashes are the number one cause of death for children. Crash data from the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration shows that, on average, in 2011 nearly 2 children under 13 were killed and 338 were injured every day while riding in cars, SUVs, pickups and vans. Unfortunately, among children under 14, fatally injured in car crashes, nearly half of are found to be unrestrained.

Securing your children properly in age- and size-appropriate child safety seats — in the back seat of your vehicle — is the most effective thing you can do to protect them in the event of a crash. In fact, in motor vehicle crashes, child safety seats reduce the risk of fatal injury by 71 percent for infants and by 54 percent for toddlers. Even though the majority of parents buckle up their children in child safety seats, booster seats, or seat belts, most do not use them correctly.

That's why Texas AgriLife Extension agent, Johanna Hicks, is urging all parents and caregivers to attend the child safety seat checkup event on Thursday, May 15. There will be certified technicians available to provide on-site child safety seat inspections and education from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Lowe's Parking lot, 1711 South Broadway St. in Sulphur Springs.

For a child safety seat to do its job right, it has to be:

- Appropriate for your child's age and size;
- Installed properly in your vehicle; and
- Adjusted to fit your child securely.

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Parents are reminded to keep children rear-facing until age two or until the limit of their rear-facing convertible seat, usually 35 pounds or more. Also, children should stay in a 5-point harness system until they are mature enough to ride in a booster seat. Booster seats are for children who are at least age four and 40 pounds or more and mature enough to sit still in a booster. Finally, keep children in a booster seat until the seat belt fits correctly. This is usually at 4 foot, 9 inches tall and sometime between ages 8 and 12 years old. The average child reaches 4 foot 9 inches at age 11!

If you're a parent or caregiver, don't miss this opportunity to have a free child safety seat inspection by a certified child passenger safety technician. Technicians can provide hands-on advice and instruction. Make sure your children are safe and you are in compliance with the current child safety seat law in Texas. The law requires all children under 8, unless taller than 4 foot, nine inches, to be in a child safety seat system which includes traditional child safety seats with harnesses and booster seats.

Remember: All child passengers under age 13 should ride securely restrained in the back seat, where they are safest — every trip, every time. If To locate a certified Child Passenger Safety Technician in Texas, go to <http://buckleup.tamu.edu>.

Follow these guidelines from NHTSA to keep your children riding safely:

- Birth - 12 months — For the best possible protection, your child under age 1 should always ride in a rear-facing car seat. There are different types of rear-facing car seats: infant-only seats can only be used rear-facing. Convertible and 3-in-1 car seats typically have higher 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 — Your 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 riding rear-facing to age 2 or older. Once your child outgrows the rear-facing car seat, your child 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, it's time to travel in a booster seat, but still in the back seat.
- 8 - 12 years — Keep your child in a booster seat until he or she is big enough to fit in a seat belt properly. For a seat belt to fit properly the lap belt must lie snugly across the upper thighs, not the stomach. The shoulder belt should lie snugly across the shoulder and chest and

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not cross the neck or face.

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