

## Child Passenger Safety Changing laws- Choosing Best Practice- Shaping New Norms

### California Child Passenger Safety Law

January 1, 2012 a new Child Passenger Safety Seat Law will be enforced. This new law extends the required use of a child safety seat to the age of 8, with the exception of children 4 foot 9 inches or taller..

### Child Passenger Restraints

under 8 yrs.....required  
under 4'9".....required  
Backseat until 8 years.....required  
Much of the current law remains the same, for a detailed description of the new law please visit [www.leginfo.ca.gov](http://www.leginfo.ca.gov)

### Choosing Best Practice

Earlier this year the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) published new guidelines on best practice in child passenger safety. These recommendations include restraining a child in a belt positioning booster until they reach a height of 4 foot 9 inches tall. These guidelines also recommend that children remain in the rear seat until their 13<sup>th</sup> birthday. Why are these gold standards? Seat belts are designed for adults, 4 foot 9 inches or taller. A belt positioning booster seat places the child and the seat belt in the correct position to afford maximum protection in a crash, protecting vital organs, and the head and spine. Positioning in the back seat is the safest seat in a vehicle reducing the occurrence of injury by 40% (NHTSA) also children do not often meet the size and weight recommended by

most vehicle manufactures for protection in the case of air bag deployment. Are these recommendations and this legislation effective? Research has demonstrated that use of a belt position booster seat reduces a child's risk of injury by 59%. National Studies evaluating the effect of legislation demonstrate that children are 39% less likely to be injured in a crash in states with required safety seats through the age of 8. (Children's Hospital of Philadelphia 2007) Comparative studies demonstrate a 4 fold increase in appropriate usage after passage of legislation requiring booster seats (Indiana University,2006).

### Shaping New Norms

Do you remember the days when seat belts were ignored and stuffed back into the crease of the seat? Today would you ever consider getting into your car and not buckling up? Probably not, so how do we encourage children to accept a booster seat to allow them to wear their seatbelt comfortably and safely? First it is important to engage your children in the decision process. Take the 5 Step seat belt test, if they don't pass with a seat belt alone, test again with a booster seat and point out how much more comfortable the seat belt fits and the much easier it is to see out the window. Not all children will pass this 5 Step test, 26% of children 4 foot 9 inches or taller did not meet this criteria, why?

Children grow in different proportions and larger vehicles, such as SUVs have deeper car seats. So it is best to evaluate every child in each vehicle to determine the safest restraint use. Shop for the booster seat with the child, let them choose the seat that is comfortable and appealing to them, so they use a booster seat for every ride, in every car.

### The 5 Step Seat Belt Test

- ✓ Can the child sit all the way back against the auto seat?
- ✓ Do the child's knees bend comfortably at the edge of the seat?
- ✓ Does the belt cross the shoulder between the neck and arm?
- ✓ Is the lap belt as low as possible, touching the thighs?
- ✓ Can the child remain seated like this for the whole trip?

For more information, contact Mary Beth Moran, Program Manager, [mbmoran@rchsd.org](mailto:mbmoran@rchsd.org), 858-576-1700, ext. 3547  
Sue Cox, Director of Trauma Services, [scox@rchsd.org](mailto:scox@rchsd.org), ext. 4010  
Cheri Fidler, Director, Center for Healthier Communities, [cfidler@rchsd.org](mailto:cfidler@rchsd.org), ext. 4389