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Car Seat Safety Starts at Birth — and Shouldn't End Too Soon

AAA and NSC Share Important Reminders Ahead of National Child Passenger Safety Week

WASHINGTON, D.C. (August 25, 2025)— A new AAA analysis of five years of government crash data shows a slight drop in child fatalities, but a troubling trend persists: child safety and booster seat use declines after a child turns three, despite the continued need for these safety devices.

This is alarming, given that nearly 100,000 children were injured in car crashes in 2023 alone, according to AAA's analysis. With the start of Baby Safety Month, and As National Child Passenger Safety Week (Sept. 21-27) approaches, AAA and the National Safety Council (NSC) highlight the importance of correct car seat use and offer essential tips to keep young passengers safe on the road.

"Saving lives is what we're all about at AAA, and that starts with making sure every kid is buckled up the right way, every time," said Jake Nelson, AAA's Director of Traffic Safety Advocacy and Research. "Car seats can be tricky — but AAA's here to help parents get it right."

"Fewer children are being injured and killed in car crashes, and that's a movement in the right direction. However, we still have a lot of work to do — especially when it comes to keeping older children safe," said Amy Artuso, Director of Mobility Safety Programs and Roadway Safety at NSC. "Children grow up fast, but seat belt readiness takes time, and booster seats can help keep kids safe until seat belts fit them correctly."

From 2019 to 2023, over 3.9 million children aged 11 and under were involved in car crashes, resulting in more than 516,000 injuries and more than 2,800 fatalities, according to AAA's analysis. Shockingly, 67% of car seats checked in 2024 were improperly installed or used, according to the National Digital Car Seat Check Form (NDCF) database.

When used correctly, car seats, booster seats, and seat belts protect young passengers. According to the [U.S. Department of Transportation](#), child restraints reduce fatalities by 71% for infants younger than one and by 54% for children 1 to 4 years old in passenger cars.

According to data from the NDCF, there are three common misuses: 1) car seat installation is too loose, 2) not using the tether when installing a forward-facing car seat with either the lower anchor attachment system or seat belt, and 3) the harness is too loose when securing a child in a car seat.

AAA's analysis of government crash data found that safety seat and booster use by children dropped by nearly 10% between ages 3 and 4 — and continued to decline as children aged. But many older children are not yet ready for a seat belt alone. The American Academy of Pediatrics estimates most children will not fit in a seat belt alone until 10 to 12 years of age.

According to AAA's analysis, the latest government data reflects a need for parents to ensure they use the correct child restraint system for each growth phase.

- **Every child deserves protection.** Nearly 4 in 10 (37%) children aged 7-11 killed in a car crash were completely unrestrained. About 3 in 10 (33%) children aged 4-6 killed in a car crash were completely unrestrained. For the youngest children, aged 0-3, 1 in 4 (26%) who were killed were unrestrained. Parents and caregivers are good at getting expert help when children are less than one year old or before birth, but they do not always come back for adjustments as the child ages. According to the NDCF, Child Passenger Safety Technicians check about five times the number of rear-facing car seats compared to forward-facing car seats, and nearly 81% of those forward-facing seats were not used correctly.
- **It's about height, not age.** Children are often transitioned out of the appropriate car seats before it is safe. According to the NDCF, nearly 23% of children move to booster seats too soon, and more than 89% transition to a seat belt too soon. Many parents may not know that seat belt fit is more about their child's height than age. Based on their size, some children older than ten years old may benefit from using a booster seat. Most booster seats accommodate children up to a height of 57 inches.
- **Find child passenger safety resources by state**, including how to get a car seat checked, occupant protection laws, and answers to car seat, booster seat, and seat belt questions. [Click here to learn more.](#)
- **Check online virtually.** Without local resources, a child's car seat and readiness for a seat belt can be checked virtually through an online meeting with National Safety Council staff. [Click here to learn more.](#)

Methodology

The statistics on child restraint use in car crashes are based on data compiled by the U.S. Department of Transportation and analyzed by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. Statistics are based on children riding as passengers in cars, minivans, vans, pickup trucks, and SUVs involved in police-reported crashes between 2019 and 2023.

In partnership with AAA and the National Safety Council, Westat researchers examined data submitted to the National Digital Car Seat Check Form (NDCF), a national database of detailed information on car seat inspections performed by certified Child Passenger Safety Technicians (CPSTs). The final dataset used for analysis represents all 50 states and includes 91,618 car seat inspections performed between January 1, 2024 and December 31, 2024.

About AAA

Started in 1902 by automotive enthusiasts who wanted to chart a path for better roads in America and advocate for safe mobility, AAA has transformed into one of North America's largest membership organizations. Today, AAA delivers exceptional roadside assistance, helps travelers plan their dream vacations and adventures, offers exclusive member discounts and benefits, and provides trusted financial and insurance services – all to enhance the life journey of our 64+ million members across North America, including over 57+ million in the United States. To learn more about all AAA offers or become a member, visit [AAA.com](https://www.aaa.com).

About the National Safety Council

The National Safety Council is America's leading nonprofit safety advocate – and has been for over 110 years. As a mission-based organization, we work to eliminate the leading causes of preventable death and injury, focusing our efforts on the workplace and roadways. We create a culture of safety to not only keep people safer at work, but also beyond the workplace so they can live their fullest lives.

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