

Is Your Grandchild Ready for a Seatbelt? Think Again!



William Conroy, 7, was in the back seat of his grandparents' car when the **CAR** lost control and hit a tree. William was wearing a seatbelt, but it didn't fit his small body. The shoulder belt was behind his back and the lap belt lay against his stomach. Severe internal injuries caused by the seatbelt resulted in a week of hospitalization at Harborview Medical Center.

"Traffic crashes are the leading cause of death for children between the ages of 4 and 8, yet most kids are improperly restrained while they ride," says Dr. Fred Rivara, a University of Washington professor of pediatrics. "Children who graduate from child-safety seats at age 4 are still too small to be protected by an adult seat belt."

Booster seats are the intermediate stage for children who are 4-years-old until they are at least 8-years-old and weigh 80 pounds. "Adult seat belts can actually be dangerous to a child," Rivara says. "Children who can't sit with their backs straight against the back-seat cushion with knees bent over the edge of the seat without slouching aren't big enough for adult seat belts."

Parents, physicians, educators, law enforcement, child-care providers and other members of the Washington State Booster Seat Coalition are urging parents to buy and use booster seats for their children.

They offer these safety tips for parents of young children:

- **START TO USE A BOOSTER SEAT WHEN YOUR GRANDCHILD OUTGROWS HIS FORWARD FACING CAR SEAT, AT ABOUT 40 POUNDS.**
- Read the booster seat instructions and your vehicle owner's manual carefully before installing a booster seat.
- All children under 13-years-old should sit properly restrained in the back seat.
- Never use just a lap belt across a child sitting in a booster seat.
- Never put the shoulder belt behind a child's back or under an arm, because this eliminates protection for the upper body and increases the risk of severe injury in a crash.
- Never use pillows, books, or towels to boost a child. These can slide out from under the child in a crash.

"Use a booster seat for those growing years between a car seat and seat belts. It's a simple solution that saves lives," states Dr. Rivara, Director of Harborview Injury Prevention and Research Center.

If you would like more information, or to receive a booster seat discount coupon, go to www.boosterseat.org or call the Safety Restraint Coalition at 425-828-8975 or 1-800-BUCK-L-UP.