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Car safety for kids: “Boost ’em before you buckle ’em!”

“Boost ’em before you buckle ’em” is an important message for parents from Harborview Medical Center during Child Passenger Safety Week, Feb. 13-19.

“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. Frederick Rivara, director of the Harborview Injury Prevention and Research Center and a University of Washington professor of pediatrics. “Children who graduate from child-safety seats at age 3 are still too small to be protected by an adult seat belt.

Booster seats are the intermediate stage for children who weigh between 40 and 80 pounds. Until a child weighs about 80 pounds or is 8 years old, he or she can’t be properly protected by an adult seat belt.

“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.”

Rivara and his colleagues offer these safety tips for parents of young children:

- ❑ 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 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 forward.

For more information, call the Safety Restraint Coalition at *1-800-BUCK-L-UP*.