

WHY CHILDREN NEED BOOSTER SEATS

Booster seats for children riding in motor vehicles have emerged as an important injury prevention strategy for U.S. children. Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for children and adolescents between the ages of 1-19 years. An estimated 3,612 child occupants died on our nation's roads in 2001.⁴ Thousands more have been injured. Booster seat-age children, generally between the ages of 4-8 years, account for 7.3% of passenger deaths.⁴ Many of these deaths and injuries could have been prevented if the children had been buckled up properly in a booster seat.

Booster seats are safety restraints designed for children who have outgrown their forward-facing car seats, but who are still not big enough to fit safely in an adult seat belt. The American Academy of Pediatrics⁵ and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)⁶ recommend booster seats for children over 40 pounds and under 4' 9" tall. Booster seat-size children generally are between 4 and 8 years of age, and between 40 and 80 pounds. Booster seats protect children by raising them so that the vehicle lap-and-shoulder belt fit correctly. Instead of the shoulder belt uncomfortably rubbing the child's face and neck or the lap belt riding dangerously up on the child's abdomen, a booster seat positions the shoulder belt diagonally across the child's *trunk* and keeps the lap belt low across the hips (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Two types of booster seats

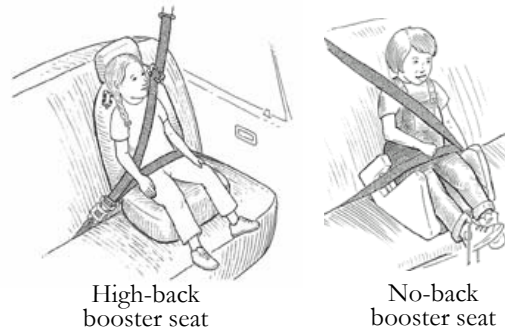
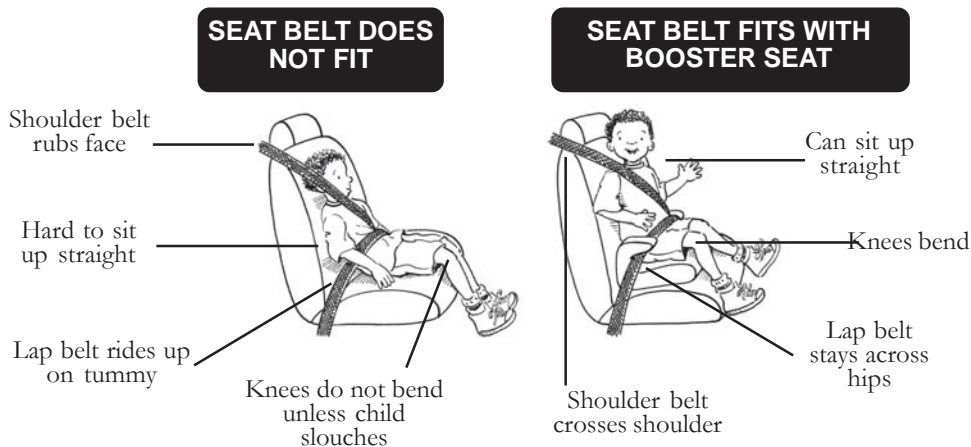


Figure 2: How booster seats help seat belts fit right



WHY BOOSTER SEATS?

Without a booster seat, an older child runs the risk of serious injury, and even death, in a car crash.⁷ Children using seat belts that do not fit properly can suffer serious head, neck, and spinal injuries that can leave crash survivors with serious disability including brain injury and paralysis. They can also suffer injuries to the abdominal area known as “seatbelt syndrome,” in which internal organs are compressed and severely injured.⁸

Booster seats have been proven to prevent these injuries and save lives. Children riding in booster seats are 59 percent less likely to suffer serious injury than those using only seat belts.⁷ Children riding in booster seats also have less risk of a head injury compared to seatbelt-only riders, a crucial difference for a child’s ability to lead a healthy life.⁹

“Safety belts are not designed to fit smaller children,” said NHTSA Administrator Jeffrey W. Runge, M.D. “Booster seats remedy that problem by positioning the belt where it is most effective.”

-Dr. Jeff Runge

Despite the benefits that booster seats offer, most parents still do not buckle their children in these seats. While national use rates of car seats among children weighing under 40 pounds is between 85-95 percent, booster seat use hovers around 19 percent nationwide.¹⁰ For this reason, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has designated booster seats one of the nation’s top traffic safety priorities.

States around the nation have recognized the importance of booster seats and are passing laws requiring booster seat use. Washington passed the first law in the nation in 2000. By the end of 2003, 23 states had booster seat legislation and more are considering legislation. Booster seats have become the new legal standard for safely transporting children.

Booster seats are still a new concept for many, and so parents, healthcare professionals, child-care providers, and other caregivers need further information and education about booster seats. Parents and professionals must know who should ride in booster seats, where to buy them, and how to install them safely.