

Growing Up Buckled Up in North Carolina



There are differences between what is LEGAL and what is RECOMMENDED for buckling up children.

Protecting Children in Crashes Requires 3 Important Steps:

1. The restraint must be right for the size and age of the child.

- ▶ **Use rear-facing child restraints (CRs)** as long as possible up to the height or weight limit of the particular seat. At a minimum, keep infants rear-facing until age 1 and at least 20 pounds. Larger infants and children need to be in a rear-facing convertible CR approved for heavier children.
- ▶ **Use forward-facing CRs with a harness** for children over 1 year old and over 20 pounds. Use the harness and/or shield until it is outgrown, usually 40 pounds. There are a few models that have harnesses or shields that can be used over 40 pounds.
- ▶ **Use belt-positioning booster seats** that make a lap and shoulder combination seat belt fit correctly for children who have outgrown their harness type CR until they are large enough for the seat belt to fit correctly.
- ▶ Add-on shoulder belt adjusters are not recommended since they are not covered by any Federal standards and may, in fact, do more harm than good.
- ▶ **Never tuck the shoulder belt under the arm or behind the back.** Both of these common practices are dangerous and illegal.
- ▶ **Use seat belts** for older children only when they are large enough for the belt to fit correctly. Usually, this will be about 8 years old and about 80 pounds. To tell if a child is big enough to use just the vehicle lap and shoulder belt, ask the following questions: 1) can he sit all the way back against the auto seat, 2) do his knees bend comfortably at the edge of the auto seat, 3) does the shoulder belt cross his shoulder between his neck and arm, 4) is the lap belt positioned low and touching his thighs, and 5) will he stay seated like this for the whole trip? If the answer is "no" to any of these questions, a belt-positioning booster seat is needed for the best crash protection.
- ▶ Whenever possible, keep children **younger than age 13 buckled up in a rear seat** of the vehicle.
- ▶ Child restraints older than 10 years should not be used. Any child seat, regardless of age, that has been in a severe crash should be replaced.

2. The child must be buckled correctly into the restraint .

- ▶ The type of harness or shield must be appropriate for the size of the child. Harnesses with shields do not fit small infants well.
- ▶ All parts of the harness must be present and in good condition.
- ▶ In general, the harness straps should be at or below shoulder level for rear-facing restraints and at or above shoulder level for forward-facing restraints. Refer to the CR manufacturer's instructions to be sure.

NC has three occupant restraint laws. Their basic requirements are that...

- ▶ All drivers and all passengers, regardless of age - front seat or rear seat, must be properly buckled up in vehicles required to have safety belts.
- ▶ Children younger than age 8 and who weigh less than 80 pounds must be properly secured in a child restraint (CR).
- ▶ Car booster seats are a type of CR that can be used for older and larger children if lap and shoulder combination belts are available.
- ▶ Lap-only seat belts can be used for children over 40 pounds if no lap and shoulder combination seat belt is available. Belt-positioning booster seats must not be used with just a lap belt.
- ▶ CRs for children less than age 5 and less than 40 pounds must be installed in the rear seat in vehicles with active passenger-side air bags if the vehicle has a rear seat.
- ▶ When a child reaches age 8 (regardless of weight) OR 80 pounds (regardless of age), a correctly fitted seat belt may be used instead of a CR to restrain the child.
- ▶ Placing the shoulder belt under a child's (or adult's) arm or behind the back is dangerous and is illegal.
- ▶ Children less than age 16 are prohibited from riding in the open bed of a pickup truck or other open cargo area.
- ▶ Drivers are legally responsible for obeying these laws.
- ▶ The penalty for violating the Child Restraint/Booster Seat law is 2 driver license points, a \$25 fine and at least \$120 in court costs.

- ▶ The harness must be as snug as possible without pressing into the child's skin and causing physical discomfort. You should not be able to pinch the strap to make a fold in the harness webbing.

3. The restraint must be correctly installed in the vehicle.

- ▶ **NEVER install a rear-facing restraint in front of an active air bag.**
- ▶ The rear seat is safer for children than the front seat. Whenever possible, child restraints (CRs) should be installed in the center-rear seat.
- ▶ Infants less than a year old or less than 20 pounds should ride in a restraint that faces the rear of the car. Follow the CR's instructions for the correct recline angle.
- ▶ The vehicle seat belt must be routed correctly through or around the restraint according to the CR's instructions.
- ▶ LATCH (Lower Anchors and Tethers for CHildren) is a new system that can make CR installation easier and without using seat belts. LATCH is found on most CRs and vehicles manufactured after September 1, 2002.
- ▶ The CR must be installed tightly in the vehicle. To check, hold the shell of the CR at the seat belt path (where the seat belt goes through the CR or where it would go through if not using the lower LATCH attachments) and pull toward the front of the car and side-to-side. There should be no more than 1 inch of movement in either direction.
- ▶ The seat belt or LATCH attachments must be locked in order to stay tight. Locking clips are needed on some seat belts. Check the vehicle owner's manual to be sure.
- ▶ Top tethers can make most front-facing restraints work better. Follow instructions to install and use tether straps whenever possible.

For further information or to order brochures or other educational materials, visit www.buckleupnc.org or contact:

UNC Highway Safety Research Center
800-672-4527 / 919-962-2202
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NC Governor's Highway Safety Program
800-999-9676 / 919-733-3083
www.ncdot.org/secretary/gfsp/

NC Dept. of Insurance Safe Kids Buckle Up
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