

Important Reminders con't

3. Always read and follow the manufacturer's instructions. If you do not have the manufacturer's instructions for your car safety seat, write or call the company's customer service department. They will ask you for the model number, name of seat, and date of manufacture. The manufacturer's address and phone number are on the label on the seat.

Also be sure to follow the instructions in your vehicle owner's manual about using car safety seats. Some manufacturers' instructions may be available on their Web sites.

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American Academy of Pediatrics, www.aap.org
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PROTECT THE ONE YOU LOVE

Car Seat Safety Information For Families With Infants



One of the most important jobs you have as a parent is keeping your child safe when riding in a vehicle.

Each year thousands of young children are killed or injured in car crashes. Proper use of car safety seats helps keep children safe. But with so many different car safety seats on the market, it's no wonder many parents find this overwhelming.

The type of seat your child needs depends on several things, including your child's size and the type of vehicle you have. The following information from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) offers guidance on choosing the most appropriate care safety seat for your child.

The AAP recommends that **all infants** should ride **rear-facing** starting with their first ride home from the hospital. All infants and toddlers should ride in a Rear-Facing Seat until they are 2 years of age or until they reach the highest weight or height allowed by their car safety seat's manufacturer.

Types of rear-facing car safety seats

There are 3 types of rear-facing car safety seats:

1. Infant only seats
2. convertible seats, and
3. 3-in-1 seats

Types of Car Safety Seats at a Glance

1. Infant-only seats

- Are used for infants up to 22 to 35 pounds, depending on the model.
- Are small and have carrying handles (and sometimes come as part of a stroller system).
- May come with a base that can be left in the car. The seat clicks into and out of the base so you don't have to install the seat each time you use it.
- Parents can buy more than one base for additional vehicles.
- Are used only for travel (not for positioning outside the vehicle).



Figure 1. Infant-only car safety seat.

2. Convertible seats (used rear-facing)

- Can be used rear-facing, then “converted” to forward-facing for older children. This means the seat can be used longer by your child. They are bulkier than infant seats, however, and do not come with carrying handles or separate bases.
- May have higher rear-facing weight (30-40 pounds) and height limits than infant-only seats, which make them ideal for bigger babies.
- Usually have a 5-point harness that attaches at the shoulders, at the hips, and between the legs. Older convertible seats may have an over-head shield (padded tray-like shield that swings down over the child).

- Every child should be supervised during transport, either by school staff or a parent volunteer, so the driver can focus on driving.
- School staff, teachers, and drivers should know what to do in an emergency, know how to properly use car safety seats and seat belts, and be aware of other safety requirements.

If you need installation help

If you have questions or need help installing your car safety seat, find a certified CPS technician. Lists of certified CPS technicians and child seat fitting stations are available on the following Web sites:

www.NHTSA.org (or call NHTSA Vehicle Safety Hotline at 888-327-4236)

www.SeatCheck.org (or call 866-SEATCHECK [866-732-8243])

www.cert.safekids.org (or call 877-366-8154) This site provides information in Spanish and also provides a list of CPS technicians with enhanced training in protection of children with special needs.

Important Reminders

1. Be a good role model. Make sure you always wear your seat belt. This will help your child form a lifelong habit of buckling up.
2. NEVER leave your child alone in or around cars. Any of the following can happen when a child is left alone in or around a vehicle:
 - He can die of heat stroke because temperatures can reach deadly levels in minutes.
 - He can be strangled by power windows, retracting seat belts, sun roofs, or accessories.
 - He can knock the vehicle into gear, setting it in motion.
 - He can be backed over when the vehicle backs up.
 - He can become trapped in the trunk of the vehicle.

continued on back

Q: What is a LATCH?

A: LATCH (Lower Anchors and Tethers for Children) is an attachment system for car safety seats. Lower anchors can be used instead of the seat belt to install the seat and may be easier to use in some cars. The top tether improves the safety provided by the seat and is important to use for all forward-facing seats. Read the vehicle owner's manual and the car safety seat instructions for weight limits for lower anchors and top tethers.

Vehicles with the LATCH system have anchors located in the back seat. Car safety seats that come with LATCH have attachments that fasten these anchors. Nearly all passenger vehicles and all car safety seats made on or after September 1, 2002, come with LATCH. However, unless both your vehicle and the car safety seat have the lower anchor system, you will still need to use seat belts to install the car safety seat.

Q: What do I need to know if my child will be driven by someone else, such as for child care or school?

A: If your child is being driven by someone else, make sure

- The car safety seat your child will be using fits properly in the vehicle used for transport.
- The car safety seat being used is appropriate for the age and size of your child.
- The person in charge of transporting your child knows how to install and use the car safety seat correctly.

Child care programs and schools should have written guidelines for transporting children. These guidelines should include the following:

- All drivers must have a valid driver's license. In some states, school bus drivers need to have a special type of license.
- Staff-to-child ratios for transport should meet or exceed those required for the classroom.

3. 3-in-1 seats (used rear-facing)

- Can be used rear-facing, forward-facing, or as a belt positioning booster.
- This means the seat may be used longer by your child.
- Are bigger in size, so adequate space within the vehicle, when rear-facing, should be determined.
- Do not have the convenience of a carrying handle or a separate base; however, they may have higher rear-facing weight (35-40 pounds) and height limits than infant-only seats, which make them ideal for bigger babies.

Installation tips for rear-facing seats

When using a rear-facing seat, keep the following in mind:

- Place the harnesses in your rear-facing seat in slots that are at or below your baby's shoulders.
- Ensure that the harness is snug and that the harness clip is positioned at the mid-chest level.
- Make sure the car safety seat is installed tightly in the vehicle. If you can move the seat at the belt path more than an inch side to side or front to back, it's not tight enough.
- Never place a rear-facing car safety seat in the front seat of a vehicle that has an active front passenger air bag. If the air bag inflates, it will hit the back of the car safety seat, right where you baby's head is, and could cause serious injury or death.
- Be sure you know what kind of seat belts your vehicle has. Some seat belts need locking clips to keep the belt locked into position. Locking clips come with most new car safety seats. If you're not sure, check the owner's manual that came with your vehicle. Locking clips are not needed in most newer vehicles, and some seats have built-in lock-offs to lock the belt.

- If you are using a convertible or 3-in-1 seat in the rear-facing position, make sure the seat belt is routed through the correct belt path. Check the instructions that came with the car safety seat to be sure.
- If your vehicle was made after 2002, it may come with the LATCH system, which is used to secure car safety seats. See page 6 for information on using LATCH.
- Make sure the seat is at the correct angle so your infant's head does not flop forward. Many seats have angle indicators or adjusters that can help prevent this. If your seat does not have an angle adjuster, tilt the car safety seat back by putting a rolled towel or other firm padding (such as a pool noodle) under the base near the point where the back and bottom of the vehicle seat meet.

Still having trouble? There may be a certified child passenger safety (CPS) technician in your area who can help. If you need installation help, see page 7 for information on how to locate a CPS technician.

Common Questions

Q: What if my baby's feet touch the back of the vehicle seat?

A: Your child can bend his legs easily and will be comfortable in a convertible seat. Injuries to the legs are rare for children facing the rear.

Q: What do I do if my baby slouches down or to the side in his car safety seat?

A: Blanket rolls may be placed on both sides of the infant and a small diaper or blanket between the crotch strap and the infant. Do not place padding under or behind the infant or use any sort of car safety seat insert unless it came with the seat or was made by the manufacturer of the seat.



Figure 2: Car safety seat with a small cloth between crotch strap and infant, retainer clip positioned at the midpoint of the infant's chest, and blanket rolls on both sides of the infant.

Q: Can I adjust the straps when my baby is wearing thicker clothing, like in the winter?

A: Yes, but make sure the harnesses are still snug. Also remember to tighten the straps again after the thicker clothes are no longer needed. Ideally, dress your baby in thinner layers instead of a bulky coat or snowsuit, and tuck a blanket around your baby over the buckled harness straps if needed.

Q: Are rear-facing convertible seats OK to use for preemies?

A: Premature infants should be tested while still in the hospital to make sure they can ride safely in a reclined position. Babies who need to lie flat during travel should ride in a crash-tested car bed. Very small infants who can ride safely in a reclined position usually fit better in infant-only seats; however, if you need to use a convertible seat, choose one without a tray-shield harness. The shields often are too big and too far from the body to fit correctly and the child's face could hit the shield in a crash.