

## Ensuring Our Children's Safety While Traveling in Motor Vehicles in Alabama

**R**iding unrestrained in a motor vehicle is the greatest risk factor for death and injury among children in Alabama. The 2007 car seat survey showed most Alabamians, 92%, use child restraints. However, while most parents believe they install and use their child safety seats correctly, 4 out of 5 car seats are not correct. Children that are in a car seat that is not installed or used correctly are nearly three and a half times more likely to be seriously injured in a crash than those using car seats appropriately.

Child safety seats are extremely effective when correctly installed and used in motor vehicles, reducing the risk of death by 71% for infants (birth to one year) and 54% for children ages 1-4. They also reduce the need for hospitalization by 69% for children ages 4 and under.

### Vehicle Safety Belts

Vehicle safety belts do not adequately protect children under 8 years old from injury in a crash. A booster seat lifts children age 4-8 up so the lap and shoulder harness of a seat belt fit them properly across the hips, chest and shoulder. Without a booster seat, the belt will go across the child's neck and stomach endangering their safety. Although booster seats are the best way to protect these children, only 19% of children who should be restrained in a booster seat use them.

### The Back Seat

The back seat is the safest place for children to ride. It is estimated that children ages 12 and under are 36% less likely to die in a crash if seated in the rear of a passenger vehicle than if seated in the front seat. All children ages 12 and under should be properly restrained in the back seat on every ride. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends children 13 and under ride in the back seat.

The back seat is the safest part of a vehicle in the event of a crash. There are more head-on crashes than any other type. In the back seat, children are farthest from the impact. About one third of children 12 years and younger who were killed in 2000 were riding in the front seat.

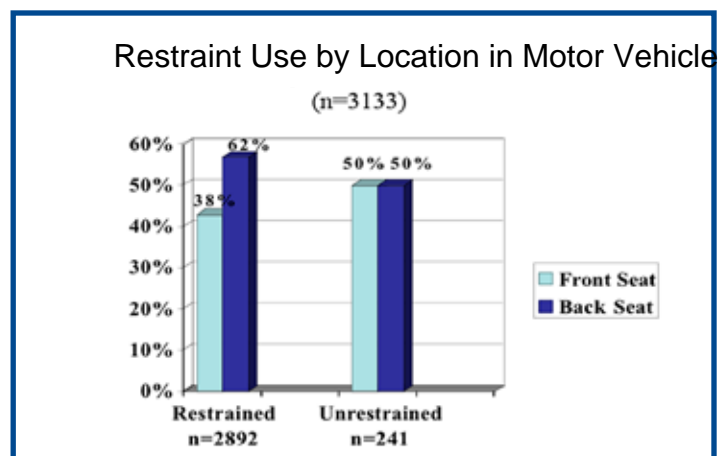
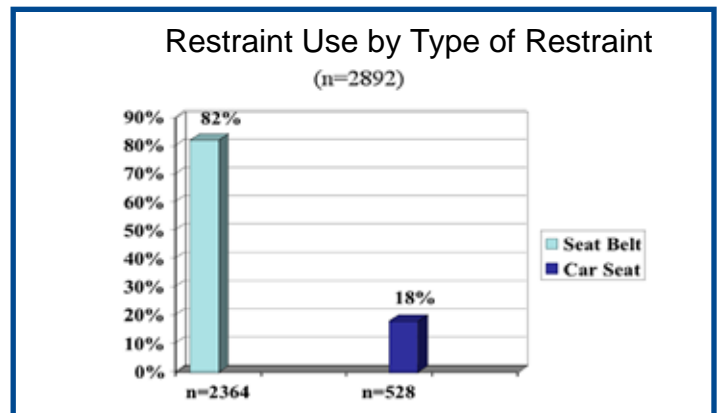
### Air Bags

The back seat also places children away from the force of a deploying air bag. Air bags inflate at speeds up to 200 mph. That blast of energy can severely hurt or kill passengers who are too close to the air bag. Children using adult seat belts that do not properly fit can lean forward, or move around placing them too close to the air bag. Unbelted or improperly belted children can easily slide off of the seat during pre-crash braking, throwing them against the dashboard where the air bag can strike them on the head or neck with tremendous force before it is fully inflated.

More than 90 percent of passenger air bag deaths have been children and infants. Children who are too close to the air bag when it deploys suffer brain injuries, injuries to the cervical spine and death. Rear-facing safety seats should never be used in the front seat. Forward-facing child safety seats can also place the child too close to the air bag before it is fully inflated.

Advanced air bags and side impact air bags are now available on newer cars. It's important to read your owner's manual to determine how they affect children. At a minimum, do not allow children to lean against the area of a side impact air bag. Remember, having advanced air bags does not mean kids should ride up front.

*In Alabama, a recent survey discovered 82% of children 5 and under were restrained using an adult seat belt. Of these, 44% were in the front seat.*



### References

- American Academy of Pediatrics
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention & Control
- Children's Hospital of Philadelphia
- Insurance Institute for Highway Safety
- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)
- Safe Kids USA

# National Guidelines & the NEW Alabama Child Restraint Law

## 4 STEPS FOR KIDS

National Highway  
Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)



### REAR-FACING INFANT SEATS

Place in the back seat from birth to at least 1 year old AND at least 20 pounds.



### FORWARD-FACING TODDLER SEATS

Place in the back seat from age 1 and 20 pounds to age 4 and 40 pounds.



### BOOSTER SEATS

Place in the back seat from age 4 and 40 pounds to at least age 8, or unless 4'9".



### SAFETY BELT

Use at age 8 or older or taller than 4'9". Children 12 years and under should always ride in the backseat.

## ALABAMA CHILD RESTRAINT LAW:

Effective July 1, 2006: Every person transporting a child in a motor vehicle operated on the roadways, streets or highways of this state, shall provide for the protection of the child by properly using...a child passenger restraint system. The size appropriate restraint system required for a child shall include all of the following: **1) Birth to age 1 or 20 pounds:** Infant-only seats and convertible seats used in the rear-facing position **2) Age 1 or 20 pounds to age 5 or 40 pounds:** Convertible seats in the forward position or forward-facing seats **3) Age 5 or 40 pounds to age 6:** Booster seats **4) Age 6 to age 15:** Seat belts

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The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) child passenger safety guidelines are the standard for safety in motor vehicles. They outline the best practice for restraining children. Alabama's Child Restraint Law is based on NHTSA guidelines but does vary in some aspects.