



Children's Health
Education Center™

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Car Seat Myths

**“I am only going to the grocery store a few blocks from home.
My child doesn't need to buckle up.”**

Traffic crashes can happen at any moment – close to home, in your neighborhood, on your route to work or driving your kids to school. According to the Safe Kids USA, 75 percent of motor vehicle crashes occur within 25 miles of home. In addition, 60 percent of crashes occur on roads with posted speed limits of 40 mph or less.

As of 2002, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation documented that vehicles throughout Wisconsin contribute to a total of 17.7 million trips per day. Roads and streets are more hazardous than highways because traffic is usually going two ways and there are many intersections and distractions.

Local streets are not designed well for crash avoidance. Highways are less hazardous because they have one way traffic, good signs, lighting at intersections, gradual curves. Guard rails and break-away poles help to minimize incidents or crashes that occur.

“If I hold my child on my lap, I can protect him or her in a crash.”

The most dangerous place in a car for a child is on your lap or in your arms. The forces in a crash are so great that it is impossible for any person to hold onto a child's body during a crash. If the adult also is unrestrained, he or she is likely to crush the child.

In a 15-mile/hour crash holding a 20-pound child, you would need to be able to hold 300 pounds of pressure. That is the weight of a healthy baby elephant.

**“My baby is riding rear-facing and her feet are hitting the vehicle seat.
That must mean it's time to turn her around forward-facing.”**

There is no evidence that longer legs are at risk of injury in a crash. Most children learn to fold up their legs for comfort when their feet touch the back of the vehicle seat.

Babies have heavy heads and fragile necks. The neck bones are soft and the ligaments are stretchy. If the baby is facing forward in a frontal crash (the most common and most severe type of crash), the body is held back by the straps. But the head is not. The head is thrust forward, stretching the neck.

Rear-facing car seats provide the best protection from injury. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends babies face the rear until they reach the maximum weight and height guidelines for the car safety seat, as long as the top of the head is at least one inch below the top of the seat back. New research indicates children should stay rear-facing into their second year, and more car safety seats are being manufactured to allow for heigher weights and heights.

"I didn't use a car seat as a child and I am here to talk about it!"

Since the time when many of us were children, much research has been done to determine ways to prevent injuries and death from motor vehicle crashes. Advancements have been made and standards have improved, not only with motor vehicles, but with car safety seats. In Wisconsin alone, we have seen an enormous increase in the number of vehicles on the roadways, from 2.8 million in 1975 to 5.4 million in 2007. The number of vehicles on the roads is not the only thing increasing. Minimum/maximim speeds have also increased. The experts agree. The research is conclusive. Car seats save lives.

Below are some basic facts that support the use of car seats:

- Nationally, an average of 5 children from birth to age 14 were killed and nearly 700 are injured every day in motor vehicle crashes, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.
- Motor vehicle crashes are the No. 1 killer of children ages 1-14 in Wisconsin.
- In Wisconsin, on average, there are 2,700 children ages 1-14 injured in motor vehicle crashes.
- Car seats, when used correctly, are up to 71 percent effective in reducing infant death and 54 percent effective for children ages 1-4.
- Booster seats, when used correctly, reduce the risk of a child's injury by 59 percent.
- Unrestrained children are more likely to be injured, suffer severe injuries and die in motor vehicle crashes than children who are restrained.