

Would Your Child's Car Seat Pass Inspection?

Securing your children properly in age- and size-appropriate child safety seats — in the back seat of your vehicle — is the most effective thing you can do to protect them in the event of a crash. In fact, in motor vehicle crashes, child safety seats reduce the risk of fatal injury by 71 percent for infants and by 54 percent for toddlers.

That's why the Brazos County Extension Agent with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, Flora Williams, is urging all parents and caregivers to have their car seats checked at the Fitting Station located at the Brazos County Extension Office. Flora Williams is a certified child passenger safety technician and is available to provide a child safety seat inspection and education. Inspections are free of charge and done by appointment only. The Child Safety Seat Fitting Station at the Brazos County Extension office is sponsored by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Passenger Safety Project in cooperation with the Texas Department of Transportation. Please call 979-823-0129 to set up an appointment to make sure your child is riding as safely as possible.

Car crashes continue to be one of the leading causes of death and injuries for children 14 and under. Safety belts and child restraints are the single most effective tool in reducing these deaths and injuries. Unfortunately, in 2015 less than half of the children killed in vehicle crashes in Texas were known to be restrained. From 1975 to 2014, an estimated 10,673 lives were saved by child restraints. At 100% child safety seat use for children under age 5, an estimated 289 lives could have been saved in 2014.

Even though the majority of parents buckle up their children in child safety seats, booster seats, or seat belts, most do not use them correctly. According to National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), nearly 3 out of 4 child safety seats are not used properly, which is a grave risk when traveling.

For a child safety seat to do its job right, it has to be:

- Appropriate for your child's age and size;
- Installed properly in your vehicle; and
- Adjusted to fit your child securely.

If you're a parent or caregiver, don't miss this opportunity to have a free child safety seat inspection by a certified child passenger safety technician. A technician can provide hands-on advice and instruction. Make sure your children are not only secured in a car seat in compliance with the Texas child safety seat law, but also check to see if you are following best practice to make sure they are traveling as safely as possible.

Remember: All child passengers under age 13 should ride securely restrained in the back seat, where they are safest -- every trip, every time.

Follow these guidelines from NHTSA to keep your children riding safely:

- Birth – 12 months: For the best possible protection, your child under age 1 should always ride in a rear-facing car seat. There are different types of rear-facing car seats; infant-only seats can only be used rear-facing. Convertible and 3-in-1 car seats typically have higher height and weight limits for the rear-facing position, allowing you to keep your child rear-facing for a longer period of time.
- 1 – 3 years: Your child should remain in a rear-facing car seat until he or she reaches the top height or weight limit allowed by your car seat's manufacturer. This may result in many children riding rear-facing to age 2 or older. Once your child outgrows the rear-facing car seat, your child is ready to travel in a forward-facing car seat with a harness.

- 4 – 7 years: Keep your child in a forward-facing car seat with a harness until he or she reaches the top height or weight limit allowed by your car seat's manufacturer. Once your child outgrows the forward-facing car seat with a harness, it's time to travel in a booster seat, but still in the back seat.
- 8 – 12 years: Keep your child in a booster seat until he or she is big enough to fit in a seat belt properly. For a seat belt to fit properly, the lap belt must lie snugly across the upper thighs, not the stomach. The shoulder belt should lie snugly across the shoulder and chest and not cross the neck or face. Children under 13 should ride in the back seat!