

News Release  
For Immediate Release

## **Give Your Child a Boost!** ***Booster seats help children fit adult seat belts***

Children who are too small to fit the vehicle seat belt are at risk. The seat belt that is designed to save an adult's life in a crash does not fit a young child. And, the poor fit of the seat belt can actually cause serious injuries or even death during a crash. Many parents are under the impression that a child can be moved to the vehicle seat belt system when they have outgrown the weight limits of their car seat. Most conventional forward-facing car seats have a 5-point harness system that can be used until at least 40 pounds. However, most children weigh 40 pounds long before they are tall enough to fit in the vehicle lap/shoulder belt.

It is not surprising that children do not fit well in the vehicle lap/shoulder belts that were designed for adults who are at least 4 feet 9 inches tall. Instead of fitting properly over the lower hips, the lap belt rides over the soft tissues of the abdomen and can cause severe injury or death. The shoulder portion of the belt hits the child's neck or face instead of lying flat across the chest. This causes many children to place the shoulder belt behind their back, leaving them with no upper body protection. A booster seat 'boosts' the child up so the lap/shoulder belt will fit correctly and provide protection in a crash.

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Community Health Educator, Flora Williams in Brazos County, reminds parents that correctly using a booster seat can protect a child from being thrown around the vehicle or being totally ejected in a crash. In a crash, children who are incorrectly restrained by a lap/shoulder belt are likely to sustain serious injuries to internal organs, as well as the head and spinal cord. In fact, these abdominal and spinal injuries are medically referred to as "Seat Belt Syndrome."

Motor vehicle crashes continue to be one of the leading causes of death and injury for children 14 and under. Car seats, including boosters, have been proven to be effective in preventing injuries and deaths and studies show that booster seats can reduce the risk of injury by 59 percent. But children in this age group are the least likely to be properly restrained. Surveys conducted during 2019 by the Texas A&M Transportation Institute found that only 27.7% of 5-9-year olds in Texas were correctly restrained. In Texas fatalities in the 5-9-year-old age group are more than 50% higher than the national rate.

The law in Texas requires children under 8 years old, unless taller than 4 feet 9 inches, to be in a child restraint system according to the manufacturer's instructions. According to the law, an 8-year-old can legally ride in the seat belt, but only a small percentage of 8-year olds are big enough to fit the seat belt correctly. While not every child who is 4 feet 9 inches will fit the seat belt — due to some children being longer in the torso and some children having longer legs — the average child reaches 4 feet 9 inches at age 11! Best practice is to keep the child in a booster seat until the lap/shoulder belts fits, which is usually sometime between ages 8-12.

The injury rate and high costs associated with medical care and lost productivity for families is huge. Booster seats are an affordable solution for protecting children who have outgrown their harnesses seat and are at least age 4, weigh at least 40 pounds and are mature enough to stay in place. The cost of booster seats is low; generally, between \$15 to \$40 for a basic booster seat. Booster seats offer a low-cost solution to a high-cost problem.

When is your child ready for the seat belt?

### **Take the Five Step Test**

1. Does the child sit all the way back against the auto seat?
2. Do the child's knees bend comfortably at the edge of the vehicle?
3. Does the belt cross the shoulder between the neck and arm?
4. Is the lap belt as low as possible, touching the thighs?
5. Can the child stay seated like this for the whole trip?

If you answered 'no' to any of these questions, your child needs a booster seat to make both the shoulder belt and the lap belt fit right for the best crash protection. Your child will be more comfortable, too!

Source: *SafetyBeltSafe* U.S.A. ([www.carseat.org](http://www.carseat.org))

Call the Brazos County Extension Office at 979-823-0129 for a free child safety seat inspection or visit <http://buckleup.tamu.edu> to find a certified child passenger safety technician in your area.