

**News Release  
For Immediate Release**

## **Traveling with Children for the Holidays? Avoid the 5 Most Common Car Seat Mistakes!**

Thanksgiving is almost here and Christmas is just around the corner. With the pandemic slowing down, families will be traveling by car and airplane to visit with relatives and friends. Sadly, the risk of being in a crash is even higher this year than last with vehicle fatalities in the first six months of 2021 up more than 18% from the same time period in 2020. This is a good time to stop and think about having your child in the proper car seat before planning your trip. Although parents always want to protect their children, studies show that nationally, 2 out of 3 car seats are not used correctly. For a car seat to best protect your child, it must be the right seat for your child's age, weight, height and developmental stage, and must fit properly in your vehicle while being installed correctly and securely.

Children are at greater risk than adults in a vehicle crash. In fact, motor vehicle crashes are one of the leading causes of death for children 13 and under. Safety belts and car seats are the single most effective tool in reducing these deaths and injuries. Unfortunately, in 2020 alone, less than 39% of the children killed in vehicle crashes in Texas were known to be restrained.

That's why the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Passenger Safety Project and Dallam & Hartley Counties Extension Agent, Kay Rogers, is urging all parents and caregivers to avoid the 5 most common car seat mistakes and secure children properly in age- and size-appropriate child safety seats in the back seat of your vehicle — which is the most effective thing you can do to protect them in the event of a crash. Child safety seats reduce the risk of fatal injury by 71 percent for infants and by 54 percent for toddlers. Get a free inspection by a certified Child Passenger Safety Technician to make sure you are using the child safety seat correctly. To locate a technician in Texas, visit: <http://buckleup.tamu.edu>. Technicians can provide hands-on advice and instruction.

If you are traveling by plane, it is always safest to purchase a separate seat for your child and bring an FAA-approved car seat. Most car seats, except for booster seats, are approved for use on an airplane. Turbulence is the greatest danger for a child on an airplane trip, and a properly installed car seat can protect your child from injuries due to being thrown around in the plane. Traveling with your car seat will also ensure that you will have it ready for your use when you arrive at your destination.

Here is a list of the 5 most common mistakes that technicians see when they are inspecting car seats and how they can be avoided.

### **1. Selection Errors:**

Most children leave the hospital in a rear-facing only infant seat or a rear-facing convertible seat. Children should remain rear-facing until they reach the maximum height or weight limit for the rear-facing convertible seat. Most convertible seats go to at least 40 pounds rear-facing, while there are some that go to 45- and 50-pounds rear-facing. At 40 to 50 pounds, it could accommodate an average 3-to-4-year-old.

Children should ride in a forward-facing harnessed seat until they reach the height or weight limit for the seat. The average forward-facing seat goes to at least 40 pounds in the harness, with many available that go to 50, 65, 70 or even 85 pounds.

When the limit of the forward-facing seat has been reached, caregivers can consider a booster seat if the child is at least 4 years old, 40 pounds, and mature enough to stay correctly seated and buckled for the entire trip. Booster seats should be used until the child correctly fits the seat belt. This is usually sometime between 8 and 12 years old when the lap and shoulder belt fit correctly.

Seat belts can be used when the child can sit up straight, bend their knees at the edge of the vehicle bench, touch the floor, and have a good fit of the lap belt over the upper thighs and the shoulder belt across the middle of the shoulder and flat against the chest.

## 2. Direction Errors:

Most parents are turning their child forward-facing too soon. Parents are understandably anxious to see their child forward-facing so that they can better interact with them. However, research shows that rear-facing is the safest way for a small child to travel. Rear-facing helps to align the child's head, neck and spine and spreads the crash forces over the child's body rather than concentrating them in any one area. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends keeping a child rear-facing until they reach the maximum weight or height limit for the rear-facing convertible. Do not worry about the child's legs against the back of the seat. Their joints are flexible and they can sit comfortably that way.

## 3. Harnessing Errors:

Many children are riding with a loose harness system that is not at the correct position in relation to the child's shoulders. For rear-facing seats the harness should be at or below the child's shoulders, and at or above for forward-facing seats. The plastic chest clip that comes on all harnessed seats needs to go across the chest armpit to armpit to make sure that the straps are properly positioned on the child's shoulders.

Test the webbing at the child's shoulders to make sure it is snug. If you can pinch up any of the webbing, it is too loose. Proper harnessing helps to prevent movement, which in turn helps to protect the child from injuries. Do not put on bulky jackets under the harness.

## 4. Installation Errors:

Installing a car seat using the vehicle seat belt requires the car seat to be locked and stay locked. Vehicles made in 1996 and newer are required to have a way to lock in a car seat in every position except the driver's seat. Most vehicles have a shoulder belt retractor that — when gently pulled all the way out — will change from locking in an emergency to locking all the time for a car seat. Some car manufacturers put the locking mechanism in the latch plate instead of the shoulder belt.

Vehicles model 2003 and newer have LATCH (Lower Anchors and Tethers for Children) installed in at least two seating positions. The lower anchors and the tether take the place of the seat belt and should not be used together with the seat belt unless both the car seat and vehicle instructions allow this. Neither LATCH nor the seat belt are safer than the other. Whether installing with the seat belt or the lower anchors, the tether is important to reduce forward head movement.

Check the car seat at the belt path to make sure it is secure. It should not move more than 1 inch side-to-side or front-to-back when tugged on at the belt path.

## 5. Skipping a Free Inspection

It is important to read the car seat manual as well as your car owner's manual to make sure you are using the car seat correctly and installing it correctly in the vehicle. In addition, have your car seat inspected by a certified child passenger safety technician.

Watch the video – *5 Most Common Car Seat Mistakes* - <https://vimeo.com/535890960> (English) or <https://vimeo.com/456716811> (Spanish).

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

Take time before you leave to make sure that the holidays will be a safe and enjoyable time for your family. Buckle everyone up correctly on every trip!