

# Kids And Airbags

Airbags are a success. They have inflated in millions of crashes, saved thousands of lives, and prevented many injuries that are more serious. Airbags, however, have caused unintended adverse effects, like bruises and abrasions that are more than offset by the lives airbags have saved.

Some airbag injuries, however, have been serious and there have been some deaths. These have occurred when someone has been on top of, or very close to, an airbag as it began inflating. Infants in rear-facing restraints and unbelted or unrestrained children in the front seats of vehicles with passenger airbags are at the most risk.

You can eliminate this risk by putting your child in a back seat and using a restraint appropriate to the child's size, as required in all 50 states.

**1. Starting with a baby's first trip put the newborn in the safest place -- a rear-facing restraint in the back seat.** Make sure the restraint is tightly secured with a safety belt and the child is buckled snugly into the restraint. At first, when a baby cannot support its head, you may need to put rolled towels or foam inserts around the head to keep it from flopping from side to side.

Many parents want to put their new babies in front, where they are easier to see. This may be tempting, but do not do it. It is not the safest place for a child to ride.

**2. Infants grow very quickly, and the restraints toddlers use differ from those for infants.** Rear-facing restraints are for babies up to at least one year old. When they outgrow these restraints, infants should graduate to child seats that face forward. They provide excellent protection, when used properly, and should be used in a back seat, not the front.

Be sure to secure your child in a restraint according to instructions. In newer vehicles, both rear- and forward-facing restraints should be easier to install because their attachments are required to mate with anchors in cars. Use safety belts to anchor child restraints in older cars. Either way, check the fit of a restraint in the vehicle in which you plan to use it before purchasing it. Some vehicles have built-in child restraints, making them easy to use correctly. Whatever type of restraint you use, remember the most important step, which is to buckle your child into it.

**3. Toddlers become big kids who outgrow their child restraints and can use the adult lap/shoulder belts provided in vehicles.** A child may need a special booster seat at first. These do just what the name implies. They boost smaller children higher so they fit better and more comfortably into adult safety belts.

Once children graduate to adult belts, remember proper use. Do not put a safety belt's shoulder portion behind a child or under the arm because it compromises protection. If necessary, get a booster seat to help fit the shoulder belt comfortably across the child. The lap belt is equally important. Position it low and make sure it goes across a child's hips. Do not let it rise up over the child's abdomen where the belt itself could become a hazard.

**4. Airbags do not have to pose a risk for kids provided they are not positioned too close to an airbag.** Pay attention to this hazard because it is serious, and then take the right steps to eliminate it:

**5. Remember these important facts and tips.**

- Proper restraint use comes first. Riding unrestrained or improperly restrained in a motor vehicle is the greatest hazard for children.
- The safest place for kids to ride is in back. This was true before airbags, and now it is doubly true. Infants and children riding in back seats cannot be in the paths of inflating airbags.
- Use your own lap/shoulder belt. Belts provide important protection in crashes, keep people in the best position to be protected by their airbags and you will set a good example for your children.

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