

First Ride, Safe Ride



Car Seat Guide for New Parents





A Parent's Guide to Protecting Your Baby With a Child Safety Seat

The first of many new parent responsibilities is to make sure your baby's first ride home from the hospital is as safe as possible. This guide will walk you through the steps. Be sure to start these steps early in the pregnancy.

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1

Virginia Law



Children Must Use an Appropriate Child Restraint Device Until Their 8th Birthday.

Safety seats must be properly used and approved by Department of Transportation (DOT) standards. Seats will state meeting DOT requirements with a certifying label on the seat shell. Do not use a seat that cannot provide this certification in writing. See example on page 6. Proper use is defined by the seat manufacturer. This information is in the manual and on the seat's labels. Proper use relates to height, weight, and sometimes age requirements.

Children Are to Ride Rear-Facing Until at Least Their 2nd Birthday.

Rear-facing safety seats should never be installed in front of a frontal active airbag. When available, safety seats should be used on the vehicle's back seat.



Exceptions to Law

The law applies to anyone (e.g. parents, grandparents, babysitters, caregivers, friends) who provides transportation for a child in any vehicle manufactured after January 1, 1968. Public transportation (e.g. taxis, buses), regulation school buses, and farm vehicles are exempt. Ride share services such as Uber and Lyft are not exempt.



Primary Enforcement

(No Other Violation Needed to Ticket)

Failure to use a child restraint device will result in a \$50 civil fine. Any person found guilty a second or additional times, on different dates, will be fined up to \$500. Children can be exempt from law for medical reasons with a written medical statement. You must have this when transporting the child or a \$20 civil fine may be received. All fines collected go into a special fund to purchase safety seats for under-resourced families.

If cost is a challenge, visit www.safetyseatva.org for information on free seat programs.

**Code of Virginia Title 46.2, Chapter 10, Article 13 § 46.2-1095 through 46.2-1100. As information about the law is subject to change, visit www.safetyseatva.org for current information.*

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Choosing the Right Seat

Why a Rear-Facing Safety Seat?

Infant neck, bones, ligaments, and muscles are not developed enough to support their head, making them very susceptible to a serious brain or spinal cord injury if in a vehicle crash. The rear-facing safety seat provides protection to the child's back, neck, and head to reduce the chance of serious injury.

Two Types of Rear-Facing Safety Seats for Infants:

1. Rear-facing-only safety seat (only used in the rear-facing position)
2. Convertible safety seat (can be used in both rear- and forward-facing positions)



Rear-Facing Only Safety Seats

Rear-facing-only child safety seats are designed to be used only in the rear-facing position.

Most rear-facing-only safety seats come with a carrier and base. See an example of a rear-facing only seat on the left. The base is installed in the vehicle, and the carrier can easily be removed from the base without taking the child out of the carrier. Rear-facing

only seats should never be installed facing the front of the vehicle.

Convertible Safety Seat

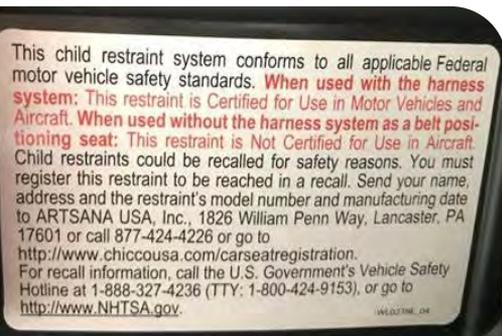
Convertible safety seats can be used rear-facing and then forward-facing. Some can even include a booster seat option (3-in-1 or all-in-one). Convertible safety seats will have at least two different sets of weight and height limits for using the seat; one for rear-facing and one for forward-facing (and one for booster if part of seat).

Convertible safety seats are larger, and designed to be used for a long period of time. See an example of a convertible seat on the right. They have higher weight and height limits in the rear-facing position than rear-facing-only safety seats. This allows the child to remain rear-facing longer, offering greater protection in the event of a crash.



Factors to Consider When Determining Which Seat is Best

Be aware of counterfeit (fake) and unregulated seats. Be careful when buying from a third-party online seller. Ensure seat is federally approved for use in the US by verifying it has a DOT certifying label. See an example of a safety seat certifying label on the left.



A rear-facing only safety seat is mobile, allowing the child to be held in the carrier. A convertible seat is bigger and stationary. The child must be removed from the safety seat in the vehicle and moved to a stroller.

A rear-facing only safety seat is smaller in size. The child will outgrow the seat much quicker than a convertible seat. Best practices would encourage a child that has outgrown a rear-facing only seat be moved to a convertible seat. Use a convertible seat in the rear-facing position as long as allowable according to the seat manufacturer's height and weight limits (American Academy of Pediatrics).

A convertible safety seat can be used by a child from birth into later childhood. However, the seat must be moved between vehicles transporting the child and may become dirty or worn from use for so many years.



FAQ

What if my baby is very small?

Premature and very small infants may need an alternative to a traditional safety seat, such as a car bed. Or they may need a slight adjustment to the traditional safety seat to better meet the manufacturer's requirements for harnessing. See an example of an adjustment in the photo on the left. Rolled receiving blankets have been placed to help better position the infant's body in the seat. Specialty seats and adjustments should not be attempted without the support of a trained medical professional or a certified CPS Technician.

Should I turn my child forward-facing if their feet are touching the back of the vehicle seat?

No. Rear-facing can prevent many serious injuries for young children. Children should remain rear-facing as long as they remain within the weight and height limits of the safety seat. A child is very flexible and can bend or fold their legs as needed to find a comfortable position.



3 Installing the Seat in the Vehicle



Correct Seat Installation is Critical to Safety

With so many different vehicles and safety seats available, correct installation is unique to each situation. Because of this, installation mistakes are common. Such mistakes impact the seat's safety features. Always refer to the safety seat and vehicle manual for guidance when installing the seat. To avoid unintentional errors, it is strongly recommended you request free installation education assistance by a certified technician to ensure accuracy

FAQ

Can I wrap my child in a blanket in the safety seat to keep them warm?

Bulky outerwear or blankets can interfere with getting a secure harness fit. Dress the child in light clothing that keeps legs free. Once the child is harnessed in the seat correctly, blankets and warmer jackets can be placed over a harnessed child.

of installation. You can find a list of participating seat check station partners at www.safetyseatva.org.

In general, always:

- Follow Virginia Law regarding type of seat and location of seat in the vehicle.
- Follow both the vehicle and safety seat manual guidance for safety seat installation.
- Realize that some seats will not fit in some vehicles. Some seats may require adjustments to meet manufacturer's safety guarantee. Work with a local certified technician or call the safety seat manufacturer's assistance line for help. Refer to page 13.



FAQ

Can I buy harness strap covers to keep my child comfortable and vehicle seat covers to protect them from stains?

Do not use any accessories that did not come with the safety seat. This includes extra padding for the seat or harness straps. Similarly, do not place any covers between the vehicle seat and safety seat that are not approved by the seat manufacturer. These items were not crash tested with the seat and may interfere with keeping the child safe in a crash. For guidance review the seat manual or call the manufacturer's assistance line. Only products supplied by the seat manufacturer are approved for use.

Are there other risks around the vehicle to plan for?

Yes, a child's body is very sensitive to temperature changes. It is best to never leave a child unattended in a vehicle for any amount of time. Leaving your cell phone, purse, or wallet in the back seat is a good habit to initiate to ensure you always check the back seat before exiting the vehicle.

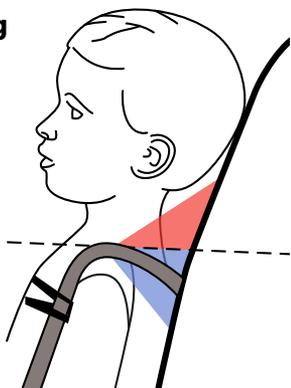
4 Securing Child in the Seat

Rear-Facing

Above Shoulder Level

Below Shoulder Level

Shoulder Level

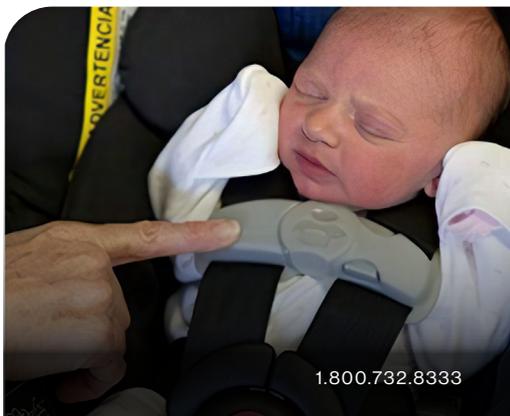


Harness Strap Placement

While rear-facing, the harness straps should always be in the slots at or slightly below the child's shoulders. Not above the child's shoulders. See example on the left. You will need to check and move to higher harness slots as the child grows to maintain this harness slot angle.

Harness Strap Fit

Harness straps hold your child in the safety seat. Harness straps should be snug, and lay flat to the child with no twists. This is achieved when you cannot pinch a fold in the harness material at the shoulders. See example to the right. If the harness straps leave a visible indentation mark on the child, they are too tight. Most safety seats have a plastic chest or retainer clip. When closed, the clip should be level with the baby's armpits. See example to the right. This clip helps to hold the harness straps in the proper position on the child's shoulders.



5 Additional Considerations



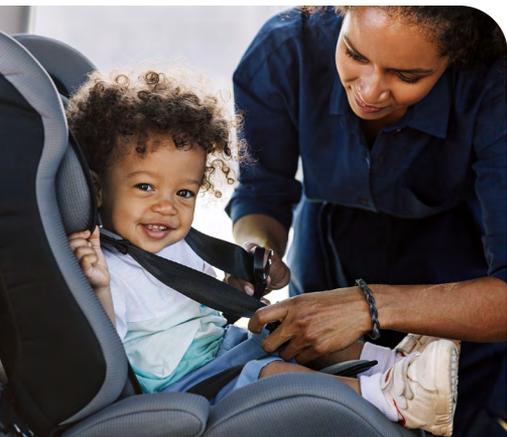
Has your safety seat been recalled?

Sometimes a problem shows up after a safety seat has been sold resulting in a recall. To be alerted if your safety seat has been recalled, register your safety seat with the manufacturer. This can be done by mailing in the prepaid postage registration card that comes with the safety seat or on the manufacturer's website. Visit www.buckleupnc.org/car-seat-recall-list to find out if your child safety seat has been recalled.

Do you have a used safety seat?

New seats are best, but if you have a used child safety seat, keep the following in mind:

- The caregiver should check the seat or contact the manufacturer to determine its expiration date.
- Seats with obvious cracks, holes, or dents should be avoided. They may suggest the seat's safety features are not as strong as they should be.
- Seats with missing parts are not safe to use as they are tested to meet safety standards with all parts.
- If you do not know its history, do not use the seat. It may have been in a crash.
- Do not use a seat without a manufacturer's label. The label confirms it is okay to be used in the USA. Labels also provide age of seat and model information for recall checks.



What to do if your safety seat is in a crash?

If the safety seat is in a crash, even if the child was not present, reference the seat manual for guidance. Manufacturers may recommend replacing the seat. The forces in a crash can sometimes cause unseen damage to a safety seat. This hidden damage may keep the safety seat from properly protecting the child in future crashes.

When should you move to a new safety seat?

US federal safety regulations require safety seat manufactures to self-certify that their seat meets safety testing standards. As such, manufactures identify a minimum and maximum weight, height, and sometimes age limit, for which the seat can be safely used in line with safety standards. Children whose weight, height, or age fall outside the indicated minimum or maximum weight, height, or age range should not use the seat. Monitor your child's growth and the upper limits of their current seat. This information will be on the seat label and in the manual. Once any of the upper limits are met, move to a new seat. If the current seat has more than one seating position (e.g. rear-facing and forward-facing positions) you should switch to the next position, if available.

Be sure to share this life-saving information with grandparents and other caregivers that may transport your child.



First Ride, Safe Ride

Child Safety Seat Resources:

Identify the right seat for your child

- [American Academy of Pediatric selection guidance](#)
- [Free seats available for applicable families, supplies limited](#)

Learn how to install and harnessing the seat to maximize safety

- [Free certified technician support](#)
- [Child Passenger Safety Board seat installation videos](#)

Know Virginia law and best practices for transportation of children

- [Virginia Department of Health legal guidance](#)
- [American Academy of Pediatric recommendations](#)
- [Injury Prevention Insights of Rear-Facing Versus Forward-Facing Seats](#)

Recall resource

- [National Highway Transportation Safety Administration recalls](#)

Virginia Department of Health

Division of Prevention and Health Promotion
Injury and Violence Prevention Program
109 Governor Street, Richmond, VA 23219

1-800-732-8333

www.safetyseatva.org