

Travel by motor vehicles has become an essential part of our daily lives, especially if you have children. However, it's easy to forget how dangerous motor vehicles can be. Because vehicles are designed to protect adults, children are especially susceptible to injury and death if involved in a car crash. You can significantly reduce the likelihood of your children being injured in a crash by properly securing them in child safety seats that are appropriate for their age and size.

## Childhood Motor Vehicle Injuries in Virginia, 2009

- In 2009, there were 19 motor vehicle traffic (MVT) deaths among children 14 and under.
- There were a total of 156 MVT injury hospitalizations among children 14 and under in 2009.
- The median charge per episode of care was \$23,285, and the average length of stay was 5 days.
- Over 6 million dollars were billed due to childhood MVT hospitalizations.
- One-half of MVT-related hospitalizations involved a traumatic brain injury.

### PREVENTION TIPS:

- **Step 1 - Infant-** Infants should ride in a rear-facing safety seat until at least 1 year old AND at least 20 pounds. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends using the rear-facing child safety seat longer if the seat has higher weight and height limits specified by the manufacturer, which can be as high as 40-45 pounds for newer seats. Virginia law prohibits placing an infant in the front seat of a vehicle with an active passenger airbag.
- **Step 2-Toddler-** When children outgrow their rear-facing safety seats they should ride in forward-facing child safety seats, in the back seat, until they reach the upper weight or height limit of that particular safety seat. It is best to use a 5 point harness as long as the safety seat will allow before graduating to a belt positioning booster.
- **Step 3 - Booster Seat-** Once children outgrow their forward-facing seats, they should ride in booster seats, in the back seat, until the vehicle seat belts fit properly. Seat belts fit properly when the lap belt lays across the upper thighs and the shoulder belt fits across the chest (usually when they are 4'9" tall).
- **Step 4 - Seat Belt-** When children outgrow their booster seats they can use the vehicle seat belts in the back seat, if they fit properly. A proper fit includes the following:
  - The child is tall enough to sit against the vehicle's seat back with her knees bent comfortable over the edge of the seat.
  - The shoulder belt lies across the child's chest, not at the neck or face.
  - The lap belt is low and snug across the thighs, not across the belly.
  - The child can ride in this position for the duration of the car ride.

**Virginia law requires all children age 7 years and younger to be properly secured in a child safety seat or booster seat regardless of the child's weight or height.**

If you are unable to afford a safety seat or need help installing one, go to [www.preventinjuriesva.com](http://www.preventinjuriesva.com) or call 1-800-732-8333.

Division of Injury and Violence Prevention  
**Virginia Department of Health**  
1-800-732-8333  
[www.vahealth.org/injury](http://www.vahealth.org/injury)