

# SAFETY

## IN NUMBERS

### Is your child in the right seat?

The greatest safety benefit for your child in a vehicle comes from the right use of car seats. Parents and caregivers want to protect their children, but too many are not using the right seats based on their children's age and size (both height *and* weight). Others move their children into the next level of protection too soon, and some do not insist on restraints as their children get older.

Car seats and seat belts help to keep you and your children in your seats during a crash. In a crash, you and your children will fare better if you stay in the right position so that your vehicle's safety systems can work as intended. Of those children under 15 who died in motor vehicle crashes in 2011, 4 in 10 were unrestrained at the time of the crashes. Those unrestrained children are more likely to be ejected from the vehicles during crashes, and children who are ejected are less likely to survive a crash.

Children don't wear adult clothing because adult clothing doesn't fit properly – and neither do adult seat belts. Children need extra occupant protection specially designed for their size and age to provide the best safety in a vehicle.

Children should ride in the back seat until they are 13.

*Children in car seats inappropriate for their age:*

**14%**

*of 1- to 3-year-olds are put in booster seats or seat belts too soon*

**25%**

*of 4- to 7-year-olds are put in seat belts too soon*

*Children completely unrestrained:*

**4%** *of 1- to 3-year-olds*

**10%** *of 4- to 7-year-olds*

**12%** *of 8- to 12-year-olds*

For more information, visit:

[www.SaferCar.gov/TheRightSeat](http://www.SaferCar.gov/TheRightSeat)



U.S. Department of Transportation  
National Highway Traffic Safety  
Administration

★★★★★  
**NHTSA**  
www.nhtsa.gov

# THE PROBLEM

## 5 most common mistakes using and installing car seats and booster seats:

**1 Wrong harness slot used**  
The harness straps used to hold the child in the car seat were positioned either too low or too high.

**2 Chest clip placement was wrong**  
Harness chest clip positioned over the abdomen rather than the chest or not used at all.

**3 Loose car seat installation**  
The restraint system moved more than 1 inch side-to-side or front-to-back.

**4 Loose harness**  
More than two inches of total slack between the child and the harness strap; there should be no slack.

**5 Seat belt placement was wrong**  
Lap belt resting over the stomach or shoulder belt on the child's neck or face.

### What data tells us

- Based on National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) crash data, in 2011 nearly 2 children under 13 were killed and 338 were injured every day while riding in cars, SUVs, pickups and vans.
- Car seats, booster seats, and seat belts are important safety devices that work only when people use them. Car seats reduce the risk of fatal injury by 71 percent for infants and 54 percent for toddlers in cars, and by 58 percent and 59 percent, respectively, for infants and toddlers in SUVs, pickups and vans. One-third of the child passengers who died in crashes were unrestrained (29% of those under age 4, and 34% of those 4 to 7 years old). (*Occupant Protection, Traffic Safety Facts, 2011 data*, [www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/811729.pdf](http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/811729.pdf)).
- Rural child (12 and younger) passenger fatalities outnumber urban deaths by more than 2 to 1 (2,478 versus 1,180 over a 5-year period). Some of the reasons for this disparity include greater distances to local hospitals, limited 9-1-1 coverage and longer response times for emergency medical services.
- Of the child (12 and younger) passengers killed while in SUVs, 55 percent were unrestrained. In other vehicle types, 43 percent of light-truck child passengers killed were unrestrained, 40 percent for child passengers of vans and 24 percent for child passengers of passenger cars.

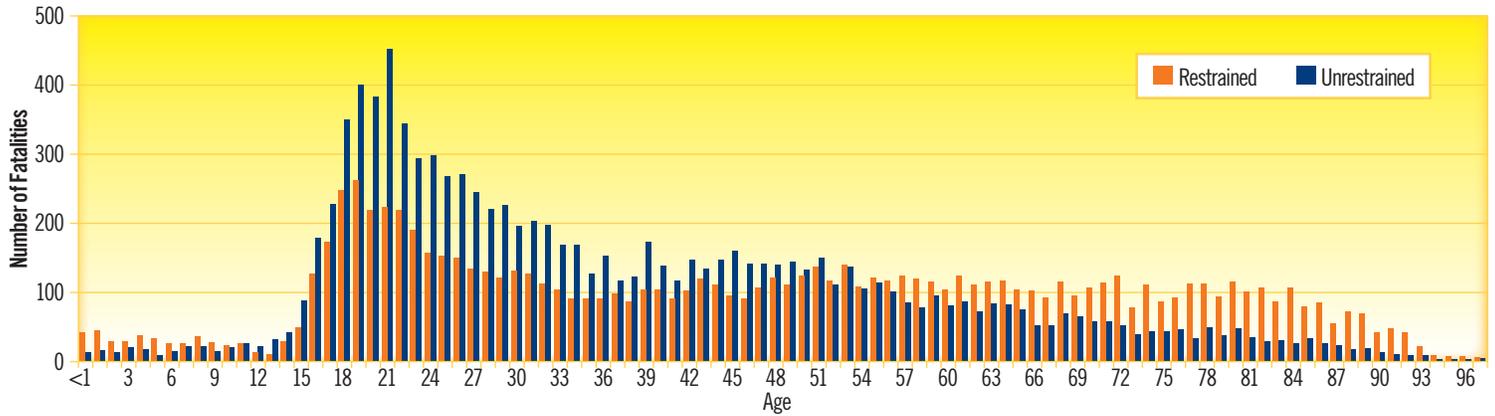
### What observations tell us

- According to NHTSA's most recent national observation survey of restraint use for children 12 and younger, there were significant improvements in the use of appropriate restraint types in 2011 (*The 2011 National Survey of the Use of Booster Seats (NSUBS)*, [www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/811718.pdf](http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/811718.pdf)).

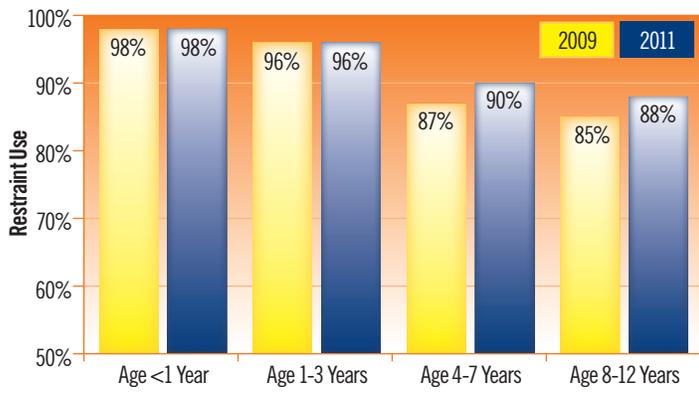
- Restraint use for all children 12 and younger increased to 91 percent in 2011. The youngest children (12 months and younger) have the highest usage rate at 98 percent, while the oldest group (8 to 12 years old) has the lowest usage rate at 88 percent. Restraint use begins declining for the 4-to-7 age group.
- NHTSA recommends that children 1 to 3 years old should be in rear-facing or forward-facing seats with harnesses depending on their height and weight. The most recent study found that only 82 percent of children in this age group were protected in age-appropriate seats. About 12 percent had been moved inappropriately into booster seats, 2 percent were in seat belts and 4 percent were completely unrestrained.
- Children 4 to 7 years old should be in forward-facing car seats with a harness or in booster seats, depending on their height and weight. Almost half of the 4- to 7-year-olds in the study were in booster seats (47%) or forward-facing seats (18%), but one-quarter (25%) had been moved inappropriately into adult seat belts. Ten percent were completely unrestrained.
- Children 8 to 12 years old should be in booster seats until they are big enough to fit in a seat belt properly. In the study, only 8 percent of the 8- to 12-year-olds were in booster seats, 79 percent were using seat belts and 12 percent were completely unrestrained.
- NHTSA's annual national seat belt observation survey found that almost all (95%) of children under 8 who were riding with buckled drivers in 2011 were restrained, but that only two-thirds (67%) of those riding with unbuckled drivers were restrained. (*Occupant Restraint Use in 2011: Results from the National Occupant Protection Use Survey Controlled Intersection Study*, [www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/811697.pdf](http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/811697.pdf)).



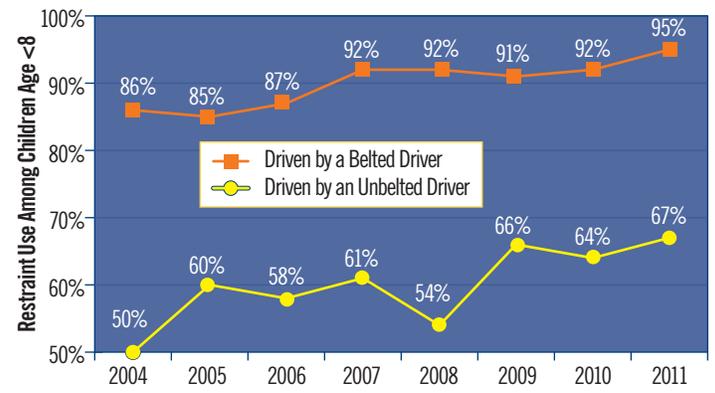
## 2011 Passenger Vehicle Occupant Fatalities — By Age and Restraint Use



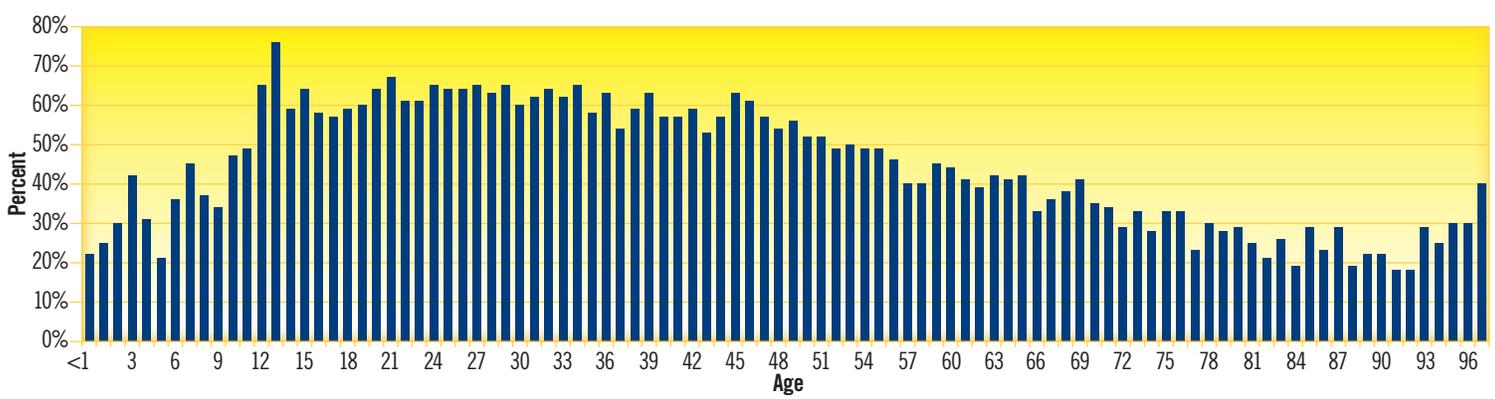
## Observed Child Restraint Use by Age and Year, 2011 NSUBS



## Observed Child Restraint Use by Driver Belt Status, 2004-2011



## Percent of Passenger Vehicle Occupant Fatalities Who Were Unrestrained, 2011



# WHAT YOU CAN DO

## We know what works

NHTSA's *Countermeasures That Work* recommends effective actions that communities can take to ensure that all children are properly protected in cars ([www.nhtsa.gov/staticfiles/nti/pdf/811727.pdf](http://www.nhtsa.gov/staticfiles/nti/pdf/811727.pdf)).

## Parents and grandparents can

- Find out if your child is in the right seat for his or her age and size ([www.SaferCar.gov/TheRightSeat](http://www.SaferCar.gov/TheRightSeat)).
- Read the instructions and labels that come with your child's car seat and read the vehicle owner's manual for important information on installing the seat in your particular vehicle.
- Go to your local car seat inspection station to have your seat checked by a Certified Child Passenger Safety Technician. If you move the car seat back and forth between two vehicles, have the seat checked with both vehicles. The technician will make sure you can install the seat correctly yourself.

### Find a car seat inspection station location near you!

[www.nhtsa.gov/cps/cpsfitting/index.cfm](http://www.nhtsa.gov/cps/cpsfitting/index.cfm)

#### Child Car Seat Inspection Station Locator



THE RIGHT SEAT. THE RIGHT SIZE. THE RIGHT USE.

Find a child car seat inspection station nearest you. Certified technicians will inspect your child car seat. In most cases, free of charge - and show you how to correctly install and use it.

search by State  search by ZIP Code

--Select State--

Show car seat inspection stations having:  
 Spanish-speaking technicians, and/or  
 Local child seat safety events.

- Use the LATCH lower anchors or seat belt to install your car seat and use the top tether to secure forward-facing car seats.
- Register your car seat and booster seat so you will be informed if there is a safety recall on your model ([www-odi.nhtsa.dot.gov/cars/problems/recalls/register/childseat/index.cfm](http://www-odi.nhtsa.dot.gov/cars/problems/recalls/register/childseat/index.cfm)).
- File a safety complaint if you believe that your child seat contains a safety defect ([www-odi.nhtsa.dot.gov/ivoq/online.cfm](http://www-odi.nhtsa.dot.gov/ivoq/online.cfm)).
- Always wear your seat belt to set a good example. Unbuckled drivers are more likely to have unrestrained children in the car.

## Healthcare providers can

- Ask parents what type of seat they are using during each visit.
- Provide educational information to parents and refer them to local car seat inspection stations for additional help.
- Prominently display the four types of child restraints (rear-facing car seats, forward-facing car seats, booster seats, and seat belts).

## States and communities can

- Include car seats and booster seats whenever you conduct high-visibility seat belt enforcement campaigns.
- Work with youth groups, schools, traffic safety agencies, law enforcement agencies, and public health agencies to include new immigrants and high-risk populations in educational campaigns and outreach.

## The right seat at the right time, every time – and in the back seat

### Rear-facing infant car seat

Your child under age 1 must always ride in the back seat in a rear-facing car seat, and should remain rear-facing as long as possible.



### Forward-facing car seat

Keep your child rear-facing as long as possible. Once your child outgrows the rear-facing car seat, he or she is ready to travel in a forward-facing car seat with a harness – still in the back seat.



### Booster seat

Keep your child in a forward-facing car seat with a harness until he or she reaches the top height or weight limit allowed by your car seat's manufacturer. Then it is time to travel in a booster seat – still in the back seat.



### Seat Belt

Keep your child in a booster seat until he or she is big enough to fit in a seat belt properly – proper fit means the lap portion is snug across the upper thighs and the shoulder portion crosses the chest. The back seat is the safest place.

