

Dispelling the Myths about Booster Seats

MYTH: Children don't need a special car seat after age 6 or if they weigh more than 60 pounds.

REALITY: Children DO need an appropriately fitted booster seat until they are 4'9" or taller. Although current California law states that children must remain in a child restraint until they are 6 years old or weigh 60 pounds, **height also is a factor in what is appropriate.** Seat belts are designed to fit people 4'9" and taller. If a shorter child does not use a booster seat, the lap belt will not fit securely over their pelvis and the shoulder belt will not lie over the clavicle, strong structures that withstand external forces and protect internal structures. Without this fit, the child is at risk for internal organ trauma and head injury.

Child Passenger Restraints
under 6 yrs.....required
under 60 lbs.....required
under 4'9".....safest

However, booster seats are not "one size fits all." All booster seats are crash tested with specific height and weight parameters. Thus it is important, regardless of brand, to check how the individual child fits.



6-year-old child dummy in a belt-positioning **booster seat**, restrained by a lap-shoulder belt. 35 mph frontal crash. **Little dummy movement**



6-year-old child dummy, scooted forward in seat, restrained by the **lap belt only**. 35 mph crash. **Extensive dummy movement.**
(Courtesy Children's Hospital of Philadelphia)

According to a recent study at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, **children ages 4-8, appropriately restrained in a booster seat placed in the rear seat of a car, are 59% less likely to be injured in a crash compared with children using seat belts alone.** The above illustration demonstrates the physics of crash dynamics.

The National Highway Transportation Association reports that booster seat usage rates decline with age, with only 71% of 5 year olds, and 35% of 6 year olds using a belt-positioning booster seat. Local information is consistent with national data. Motor vehicle accidents continue to be the #1 cause of unintentional death in children 5-14 in San Diego County.

Conclusion

It can be difficult for parents to determine the appropriate seat and restraint for their child. **It is best practice for health and childcare professionals to encourage caregivers to maintain the correct child seat for the child's age, weight and height, and consult with child passenger safety professionals if they are uncertain.** Rady Children's Hospital offers weekly child passenger safety events to evaluate each child's restraint system. For a list of upcoming events and to schedule an appointment visit our website at www.rchsd.org, click on "your child's health" then onto "Health and Safety-Injury Prevention."

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