



Texas Department of Transportation

Child Passenger Safety Week
Texas Department of Transportation
Campaign Messages and Media Q&A
September 18-24, 2011

Campaign Messages

Note: Campaign messages are written to motivate and influence our audience to increase awareness of child restraint use and the proper use of child safety seats. During Child Passenger Safety Week (September 18-24), parents and caregivers are urged to make sure their child safety seats and booster seats are properly installed and used in their vehicles. The following key messages will serve as the foundation for all PR materials geared to our audience, including talking points for deskside briefings, grantee and partner outreach and the campaign news release. Key messages will not be provided to media in this format. See media Q&A below.

Child safety seats and booster seats save lives – offering the best protection for children in the event of a crash.

- Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for children 14 years old and younger (based on figures from the National Center for Health Statistics).
- According to National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) data, approximately 9,310 lives have been saved from 1975 to 2009 by the proper use of car seats.
- Child safety seats reduce the likelihood of an infant (under 1 year old) being killed in a vehicle crash by 71 percent, and reduce the likelihood to toddlers (1 to 4 years old) by 54 percent (NHTSA).
- Children ages 4 to 7 who use booster seats are 59 percent less likely to be injured in car crashes than children who are restrained only by seat belts, according to a study by Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

Texans are making great strides in ensuring their children are restrained, but we can do better.

- A 2011 study conducted by the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) in 14 cities across the state found that 10.5 percent of observed children were riding unrestrained.
- In 2011, the statewide child restraint usage rate was 89.5 percent. This is the highest usage rate since the TTI study has been conducted.
- The TTI study also found that child restraint use varied from throughout the state, with highest usage in Austin to extremely low usage rates in Brownsville.
- This is a significant difference between cities across Texas and points to the need for increased awareness among all Texans about the need to restrain all children seated in a motor vehicle, and to restrain them properly.

For Texas families, there are serious consequences for not restraining children.

- In 2009, 38 percent of statewide fatalities for children ages 8 and under, involved in an accident, were not restrained, up from 32 percent in 2008, according to data collected from the Texas Peace Officer's Crash Reports.
- The Texas Child Restraint Law was changed in 2009, requiring all children younger than 8 years old, unless taller than 4 feet 9 inches, to be in some sort of child restraint in the car. This includes car seats and booster seats.
- A fine of up to \$25 for a first offense and \$250 for a second subsequent offense may be issued.

Child safety seats work best when used correctly.

- NHTSA estimates that roughly 3 out of 4 child safety seats are not used correctly.
- Research shows that child restraints provide the best protection for all children up to age 8 (NHTSA).
- In 2008, the National Survey of the Use of Booster Seats found that only 43 percent of children 4 to 7 were riding in booster seats. NHTSA recommends that children who have outgrown their child safety seats should ride in booster seats until the seat belt fits properly (usually when they are at least 8 years old or 4'9" tall).
- Failure to read the child safety seat manufacturer's instructions, in addition to vehicle owner's manual instructions regarding installation, could result in serious injury or death as a result of a failure of the child safety seat to be securely and/or properly restrained.

Well meaning Texas families are not buckling up their children correctly, which can result in serious injury in a crash.

- A 2011 study conducted by the TTI in 14 cities across the state found 30.2 percent of children observed in child safety seats were incorrectly restrained in an unsafe manner; local observations by safety seat technicians indicate that this number is significantly higher in some areas.
- Correctly restraining children greatly reduces the risk of serious injury or death in a crash. According to a study by Children's Hospital of Philadelphia:
 - For infants (under 1 year old), there is a 71 percent reduction in likelihood of death;
 - For toddlers (1 to 4 years old), there is a 54 percent reduction in likelihood of death; and
 - For children ages 4 to 7 who use booster seats, they are 59 percent less likely to be injured in car crashes than children who are restrained only by seat belts.

The Texas Department of Transportation, along with partner organizations, will be out in full force the week of September 18-24 to help Texas families learn to secure their children in the appropriate child safety seats, booster seats and seat belts.

- Free safety seat check-ups are being held throughout Texas, offering parents and caregivers a chance to learn about the proper safety seat for their child and the correct way to install it.
- SafeKids certified technicians will be available on "National Seat Check Saturday," (September 24, 2010) to provide advice and hands-on child safety seat inspections across the state for free.
- Visit www.bucklethemright.org to learn more about how to properly secure children and where to find a child safety seat check point, as well as other resources.

Remember: All children younger than 13 should ride in the back seat. For maximum child passenger safety, parents and caregivers can visit their local inspection station and refer to the following guidelines for determining which restraint system is best suited to protect children based on their age and size:

- **Birth – 12 months**
For the best possible protection, your child under age 1 should always ride in a rear-facing car seat. There are different types of rear-facing car seats: infant-only seats can only be used rear-facing. Convertible and 3-in-1 car seats typically have higher height and weight limits for the rear-facing position, allowing you to keep your child rear-facing for a longer period of time.
- **1 – 3 years**
Your child should remain in a rear-facing car seat until he or she reaches the top height or weight limit allowed by your car seat's manufacturer. This may result in many children riding rear-facing to age 2 or older. Once your child outgrows the rear-facing car seat, your child is ready to travel in a forward-facing car seat with a harness.
- **4 – 7 years**
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. Once your child outgrows the forward-facing car seat with a harness, it's time to travel in a booster seat, but still in the back seat.

- **8 – 12 years**

Keep your child in a booster seat until he or she is big enough to fit in a seat belt properly. For a seat belt to fit properly the lap belt must lie snugly across the upper thighs, not the stomach. The shoulder belt should lie snugly across the shoulder and chest and not cross the neck or face.

Media Q&A

The following Q&A responses can be used by those Child Passenger Safety Week campaign spokespeople. These Qs are intended to address questions about the campaign itself, providing campaign goal sound bytes. Spokespeople will also draw from the messaging above.

Q. What is Child Passenger Safety Week?

A: Child Passenger Safety Week (September 18-24) is an annual campaign designed to bring public attention to the importance of properly securing all children in appropriate child safety seats, booster seats or seat belts – every trip, every time.

The campaign ends on September 24 with “National Seat Check Saturday,” when certified child passenger safety technicians will provide advice and hands-on child safety seat inspections for free.

Q: What is the new safety belt law in Texas?

A: Since September 1, 2009, all occupants of a vehicle, no matter their age, must be secured by a safety belt—even those riding in the back seat. All children younger than 8 years old who are less than 4 feet 9 inches tall must be in some sort of child restraint in the car. This includes car seats and booster seats. Texas families face fines from \$25 up to \$250 for non-compliance.

Q: How will you get the word out to Texas families?

A: We all know that parents and caregivers take great measures to ensure the safety of their children; however, some are unaware of the dangers of not restraining their children. Even more parents and caregivers are unaware that they may be restraining their children incorrectly.

Child Passenger Safety Week is a time to focus our efforts to ensure Texas families are aware of the new laws regarding child restraint, the dangers of not restraining and not properly restraining children, and to also show parents and caregivers how to correctly restrain their children.

To do this, child passenger safety organizations across the state are conducting free hands-on child safety seats inspections and will be offering advice and instruction during the week and on “National Car Seat Check Saturday,” September 24, 2011.

Our website, www.bucklethemright.org will house information on where the child safety seats inspections will be held, as well as other valuable information and resources.

Q: Why is the Child Passenger Safety Week program focusing on only some cities in Texas?

A: Child Passenger Safety Week is being promoted throughout the state. However, we are focusing our greatest efforts in those areas that have the highest percentage of incorrectly restrained or unrestrained children.

Q: How do parents and caregiver know if they are correctly restraining their children?

A: All children younger than 13 should ride in the back seat. For maximum child passenger safety, parents and caregivers can visit their local inspection station and refer to the following **4 Steps for Kids** guidelines for determining which restraint system is best suited to protect children based on their age and size:

1. For the best possible protection keep infants in the back seat, in rear-facing child safety seats, as long as possible up to the height or weight limit of the particular seat. At a minimum, keep infants rear-facing until a minimum of age 1 and at least 20 pounds.

2. When children outgrow their rear-facing seats (at a minimum age 1 and at least 20 pounds) they should ride in forward-facing child safety seats, in the back seat, until they reach the upper weight or height limit of the particular seat (usually around age 4 and 40 pounds).
3. Once children outgrow their forward-facing seats (usually around age 4 and 40 pounds), 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 at age 8 or when they are 4'9" tall).
4. When children outgrow their booster seats, (usually at age 8 or when they are 4'9" tall) they can use the adult seat belt in the back seat, if it fits properly (lap belt lays across the upper thighs and the shoulder belt fits across the chest).

Q: What resources are available to Texas families to ensure they are correctly installing child passenger restraints?

A: Visit www.bucklethemright.org to learn more about how to properly secure children and where to find a child safety seat check point. The website also features video demonstrations on installing child safety seats and crash test simulations, where parents and caregivers can see firsthand the effects of improper child restraint.

For more information on Child Passenger Safety Week and to find the car seat inspection station nearest you, visit www.nhtsa.gov or SafeRiders @ <http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/saferiders/>. For live updates follow [@childseatsafety on Twitter](https://twitter.com/childseatsafety) or join the community of parents, advocates and safety experts on www.facebook.com/childpassengersafety.