Child Passenger Safety

I'm precious cargo

Buckle Me Up

Child Passenger Safety
Maine Child Passenger Safety Program

**Car Seat Distribution and Inspection Locations:**
Certified technicians provide car seat education and, when applicable, car seats. Car seats are available at distribution locations to families that meet eligibility requirements. Education includes correct use and installation of car seats and seat belts using visual demonstrations.

*For more information:*
Please contact the Maine Bureau of Highway Safety at 207-626-3840
maine.gov/dps/bhs/

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Installing Child Safety Seats

Child Safety Seat Recommendations

Newborns – 12 Months
Children under the age of 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 use it for a longer period of time.

1 – 3 Years
Keep your child rear-facing as long as possible. It's the best way to keep him or her safe. 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. Once your child exceeds the manufacturer’s maximum height and weight limits to ride rear-facing, they are 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 – 13 Years
Keep your child in a booster seat until he or she is big enough to fit in a seat belt properly.

Source: NHTSA

For more information: Maine Bureau of Highway Safety at 207-626-3840.
Select and Install Child Safety Seats (CSS)

The best child safety seat for your child:

1. Is the one that fits them based on age, size, and developmental needs;

2. Fits the vehicle;

3. Will be used correctly every time based on both the child safety seat manufacturer and vehicle manufacturer’s instructions.
Did you know? It’s never okay…

- To put a rear-facing CSS in front of an active airbag
- To install a rear-facing-only CSS forward facing
- To allow a child to ride without being properly secured

- To hold a child on your lap while riding in a vehicle
- To use bulky clothing under the CSS harness
- To wear a backpack or any other item while riding in a vehicle

For more information: Maine Bureau of Highway Safety at 207-626-3840.
Did you also know?

The rear-facing CSS must be installed at an angle required by the manufacturer.

Most rear-facing-only infant seats can be installed with or without the base.

That children's toys or other hard objects in your vehicle can become projectiles in a crash.

That a child under 13 years of age should ride in the backseat.
Rear-Facing Child Safety Seats

A rear-facing child safety seat is a piece of safety equipment that is designed to protect the head, neck, and spine during a crash.

For Proper Installation:
Place the child safety seat in the proper direction and angle.

Use the correct belt path to secure the child safety seat with the seat belt or lower anchors (NOT BOTH).

Press down firmly on the base or child safety seat while tightening the seat belt or lower anchors.

You should not be able to move the child safety seat more than 1 inch side to side or front to back at the belt path.

For more information: Maine Bureau of Highway Safety at 207-626-3840.
Steps for Properly Securing Your Child Rear-Facing

1. The top of the child’s head should be no closer than 1 inch to the top of the plastic shell.

2. Harness straps should come out of the harness slot that is at or below the child’s shoulders.

3. Tighten harness straps snugly. A snug strap should not allow any slack. The harness should lie in a relatively straight line without sagging. It does not press on the child’s flesh or push the child’s body into an unnatural position. You should not be able to pinch excess webbing at the shoulder or hips once the harness is buckled.

4. Position the harness chest clip at arm pit level.

5. Some child safety seats have shoulder pads attached to the straps. If used, the pads must be properly positioned on the child’s shoulders. Read the manufacturer’s instructions for proper use.

If your child needs additional head support, you can use rolled receiving blankets on either side of the child to provide additional support. Position receiving blankets from the top of the hips to the top of the head. DO NOT put rolled blankets around the head or underneath the child’s head/neck or use head supports that were not manufactured for your child safety seat.
A forward-facing child safety seat is a piece of safety equipment that is designed to protect the head, neck, and spine during a crash.

**For Proper Installation:**

- Place child safety seat in the proper direction.
- Use the correct belt path to secure the child safety seat with the seat belt or lower anchors (NOT BOTH).
- Press down firmly on the base or child safety seat while tightening the seat belt or lower anchors (NOT BOTH).

You should not be able to move the child safety seat more than 1 inch side to side or front to back at the belt path.

Connect tether and tighten.

For more information: Maine Bureau of Highway Safety at 207-626-3840.
Steps for Properly Securing Your Child Forward-Facing

1. Mid-point of the back of the head should not be above the top of the child safety seat plastic shell.

2. Harness straps should come out of the reinforced harness slot that is at or above the child’s shoulders.

3. Tighten harness straps snugly. A snug strap should not allow any slack. The harness should lie in a relatively straight line without sagging. It does not press on the child’s flesh or push the child’s body into an unnatural position. You should not be able to pinch excess webbing at the shoulder or hips once the harness is buckled.

4. Position the harness chest clip at arm pit level.

5. Some child safety seats have shoulder pads attached to the straps. If used, the pads must be properly positioned on the child’s shoulders. Read the manufacturer’s instructions for proper use.
Belt-Positioning Booster Seats

All children whose weight or height is above the forward-facing limit for their harnessed child safety seat should use a belt-positioning booster seat until the vehicle seat belt fits properly, typically when they have reached 4 feet 9 inches in height and are between 8 and 12 years of age.

For proper travel and greatest safety:

- The vehicle lap belt should fit snugly across the child’s upper thighs and/or hips while the shoulder belt is snug across the chest.
- Always use both the vehicle lap and shoulder seat belt with the booster.
- Never put the shoulder belt behind the back or under the arm or across the neck.
- Never use pillows, towels or books as a booster seat.

Always follow the 5-Step Test

1. Does the child sit all the way back against the auto seat?
2. Do the child’s knees bend comfortably at the edge of the vehicle seat?
3. Does the belt cross the shoulder between the neck and arm?
4. Is the lap belt as low as possible, touching the thighs?
5. Can the child stay seated like this for the whole trip?

If you answered “no” to any of the 5-step Test questions, your child is not ready to stop using the booster.

Why use booster seats?

Booster seats raise the child so that your vehicle’s safety belts are properly aligned to the child’s body, and fit across the collarbone and hips and/or thighs just as they would on an adult. There are two types of booster seats: the high-back and backless. The high-back features built-in head and neck restraints proportioned for children. The backless booster relies on head and neck protection built into the vehicle’s seat.

For more information: Maine Bureau of Highway Safety at 207-626-3840.
Once your child outgrows a booster seat (usually 4 feet 9 inches or taller), you still want to make sure that the vehicle’s safety belt is being worn properly.

Things to keep in mind when using a seat belt system:

- Never put a small child in a seat belt. The incorrect placement of the lap shoulder belt can cause serious injuries in a crash.

- Never allow a child to put their shoulder belt behind their back, under their arm, or across their neck. Using a shoulder belt improperly may result in serious injury to the back or spinal cord in the event of a crash.
What to Know About Airbags

There’s a good reason that all car manufacturers are required to display warning labels regarding inflatable restraint systems, or “air bags.” They are designed to inflate with tremendous force and speed, and can cause serious injury or death to children, especially infants in rear-facing child safety seats. That’s why rear-facing child safety seats must never be placed in front of an active air bag and it’s safer for children under 13 years of age to be properly restrained in the back seat of the vehicle.

Warning Labels

Many new vehicles are equipped with air bags, and even inflatable seat belts, to help protect both front and rear seat occupants. By law, all restraint systems are required to have an air bag warning label. If you’re not sure about your vehicle, it’s simply a matter of looking for the warning labels provided by the manufacturer, which can be found in a variety of locations, including:

• Seat belts
• Vehicle sun visor
• Side of seat
Lower Anchors and Tethers

Lower Anchors
LATCH is an acronym for Lower Anchors and Tethers for Children. Lower anchors, sometimes referred to as LATCH, are an alternative way to attach the child safety seat to the vehicle. Lower anchors secure a child safety seat to the vehicle’s rear seats using straps from the child safety seat that connect to special metal anchors built into the vehicle. However, unless both the vehicle and the child safety seat are designed to use the lower anchors, the vehicle’s safety seat belt will need to be used to secure the child safety seat instead. The lower anchors and the vehicle’s seat belt system should never be used together unless the manufacturer allows the use of both. There are only a few select car seats and manufacturers that allow the use of both.

The weight limit for using lower anchors is 65 pounds. The 65 pound limit is a combination of the child’s weight and the car seat weight.

Tether
For forward-facing seats, you must use the tether whether installing with a seat belt or lower anchor.

Most rear-facing child safety seats do not allow for the use of the tether. Read your child safety seat instructions for proper use.

There are weight limits for using the tether. Please refer to the vehicle manufacturer’s instructions for more information.
Special Needs

Premature infants and children with respiratory difficulties, orthopedic challenges, and neurological and behavioral problems may require special child restraints. Depending on your child’s needs, you will want to make sure that your vehicle can accommodate its unique requirements.

Compatibility Issues

**Pickup Truck Jump Seats**
Child safety seats cannot be used safely in side-facing pickup truck jump seats. Never try to position a child safety seat in a jump seat.

**Contour Seats**
Cars with deep bucket seats, contoured with a hump in the center, can make it difficult or impossible to install a child safety seat in the correct position. To be sure a child safety seat will fit properly in your vehicle, try installing it before you purchase it.

**Locking Clips**
Some older vehicle seat belt systems (manufactured prior to 9/1/1996) require additional hardware, such as a locking clip, to secure the child restraint. New seat belt systems have a built-in locking mechanism. Refer to the vehicle manufacturer’s instructions to determine whether to use a locking clip to secure the child safety seat.

Frequently Asked Questions

**When can I safely turn my child around forward facing in a car seat?**
The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends keeping a child in a rear-facing car seat until at least 2 years old or until the maximum height and/or weight that car seat allows.

**When can my child safely ride in a booster seat?**
A child can ride in a booster seat when they meet the manufacturer’s guidelines for use of their restraint.

**When can my child safely sit in the front seat of a vehicle?**
The National Highway Safety Traffic Administration recommends that a child be at least 13 years old and at least 100 pounds before they ride in the front seat of a vehicle.

**Do I need to use the tether for a forward-facing car seat?**
The general answer is YES. Follow the manufacturer’s instructions for proper installation.
Frequently Asked Questions

When can my child safely sit with a seat belt only?
A child must properly fit in the seat belt before they can begin using it without a booster seat. Every vehicle is different, so fit will vary, but most children do not properly fit in a seat belt until they are 4 feet 9 inches. Maine state law requires a child to be 8 years old AND 80 pounds before they ride in only a seat belt.

Can I install a car seat using both the lower anchors and seat belt?
The general answer is NO. It is EXTREMELY rare for a manufacturer to allow the use of both for an installation, but the only way to be certain is to follow the manufacturer’s instructions. If you don’t have the instructions with you and you haven’t contacted the manufacturer directly, assume they DO NOT allow you to use both.

How long is my car seat good for?
Many manufacturers provide an expiration date, but for those who do not list an expiration date, it is recommended to discontinue use after 6 years from the date of manufacture.

Can I use my car seat after it’s been in a crash?
Car seats are a one-time-use safety device. Follow the manufacturer’s recommendation for what to do if the car seat is involved in a crash.

How tight should the car seat be installed?
Once installed with either the lower anchors or seat belt, a car seat should not move more than 1 inch side to side or front to back when checked for tightness at the belt path.

How snug should the harness hold the child in a car seat?
The harness should be snug and as close to the child’s body as possible (no bulky clothing). To check for snugness, you should not be able to pinch any excess webbing at the child’s shoulder or hips.

Where should the harness clip be placed on the child in a car seat?
The harness clip is placed in-line with the child’s armpits.

What harness slot should I use in a car seat?
Follow the manufacturer’s instruction for which harness slot to use based on the age, weight and height of the child. When the child is rear-facing, use the harness slots at or below the child’s shoulder. When the child is forward-facing, use the harness slots at or above the child’s shoulder.
Maine’s Child Passenger Safety (CPS) law is one of the strongest in the country. The law requires that:

- Children who weigh less than 40 lbs. must ride properly secured in a child safety seat;

- Children who weigh between 40 lbs. and 79 lbs. AND who are less than 8 years old, must ride properly secured in a federally approved child restraint system;

- Children who are taller than 4 feet 9 inches in height and who are no longer using a child restraint system, must be properly secured with a seat belt and;

- Children who are under 12 years old AND who weigh less than 100 lbs. must be properly secured in the back seat of the vehicle, if possible.
Important Child Passenger Safety Links

Safety Belt Safe  http://www.carseat.org/
Safe Ride News http://www.saferidenews.com/srndnn/
American Academy of Pediatrics  https://www.aap.org
Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia
For more information:
Please contact the Maine Bureau of Highway Safety at 207-626-3840.
www.maine.gov/dps/bhs/