

Car Safety

UNION AVENUE PEDIATRICS

The decrease in the number of serious injuries to automobile passengers in the last 20 years is one of the miracles of modern safety management. However, about one-fourth of childhood brain injuries, and many other serious trauma problems, are still due to motor vehicle accidents. And this includes some children who were using seat belts. To keep your children safe in the car, remember these rules:

“ Always be sure your child is seat-belted in the back seat of the car. The back seat is the safest seat for children. Never have children in a seat with a passenger air bag as these can inflict severe injury to a small passenger when they inflate forcefully even in a minor collision. Cars are safer, but seat belts are the principal reason for the decrease in serious and fatal passenger injuries. Yet in police-reported crashes in 1991, only 55% of children were buckled up. Driving without all car occupants properly seat-belted is illegal in Washington. Never allow your child to move about in a car, van, station wagon, or other vehicle in motion. Don't buckle children in van swivel seats.

“ Be sure your seat belts function properly and are properly used. Any seat belt which does not properly retract, is frayed, or is otherwise not functioning as designed should be immediately repaired. Be sure lap belts are fastened snug, and are placed over the hips, not over the belly. Improper use of seat belts is a principal cause of their failure.

“ Be sure all occupants of the car have seat belts secured. Children being struck during an accident by an unrestrained adult may suffer serious injury or death.

“ Riding in the back of a pickup is even more dangerous. The risks include being thrown about in a hard metal environment, falling out, and breathing carbon monoxide.

“ Infants in car seats should be placed in the rear seat of the car, and the car seat belt and the infant car seat harness should both be snug. The rear seat is far safer than the front passenger seat. It is essential that the infant be in the back seat if your car is equipped with a passenger air bag. Air bag inflation against an infant in a rear-facing car seat may be fatal to an infant. Loose harnesses are a principal cause of failure of infant car seats during accidents. Under 1 year or under 20 pounds of age, infants should face backwards. Washington State law requires infants and children to travel in a car seat until they reach 40 pounds. Booster seats

are highly recommended until the child reaches 60 pounds. Follow this link from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) for the [1-minute Car Seat Safety Check Up](#) and this link to the [AAP Car seat Buyers Guide](#) for an explanation of how to select a car seat for your child's needs.

Washington state law has been revised to stricter new standards. Follow this link to the text of the current that went into effect July 1, 2002. [Washington State Child Safety Restraint Law](#).

.. When carrying children, do not carry heavy, unrestrained luggage behind the child's seat or in the luggage compartment. During an accident, rear seat backs may not be strong enough to prevent heavy luggage from crushing a fragile passenger.

.. Preschool and younger grade school children should always have adult supervision when crossing at an intersection. Pedestrian accidents have also decreased remarkably, but each year we see preventable deaths and serious injuries to brain and body parts of children who are not properly supervised at street crossings.

.. Teach all children to cross streets only at approved crosswalks, to carefully observe stoplights, and to look both ways before crossing. Stoplights are valuable, but don't assume that every vehicle obeys them. Accidents related to crossing between intersections are a principle cause of death and serious injury to school-aged children. Running out into the street between parked cars can be disastrous. Do not allow your children to play ball near a street or on it. The urge to run after the ball, no matter where it goes, makes an accident almost inevitable.

.. Bicycle-motor vehicle accidents are a principal cause of serious trauma and brain injury of children. Do not allow your child to bicycle in heavily traveled areas. Younger children should always bicycle on the sidewalk, or otherwise off the road pavement, and should always walk their bicycles across the street at approved crosswalks. Bicycle riders should always wear approved helmets. Children riding bicycles on heavily traveled streets and roads should always be accompanied by an adult. Bicycles used in these locations should have rear view mirrors and proper reflectors, and the leader should have a flag. Avoid all bicycle riding on heavily traveled streets and roads at night or in heavy rain or fog.

.. The principal cause of adolescent brain injury and serious trauma is the operation of a motor vehicle while intoxicated. Alcohol and operating a motor vehicle do not mix, and only zero consumption is surely safe. Yet every year teen-agers illustrate that truth with the sacrifice of their lives or normal brain or body.