

Safety

- The safest position for your infant's car seat is in the back seat.
- It is recommended that all infants and toddlers should ride in a Rear-Facing Car Safety Seat until they are 2 years of age or until they reach the highest weight or height allowed by their car safety seat's manufacturer.
- Whenever possible, an adult should travel in the back seat with the baby.
- If you are borrowing or reusing a car seat, the seat must be less than 6 years old. The structural integrity of the seat may decrease over time. A manufacturer's label with the date of manufacture is found on all car seats.
- Be sure that second-hand car seats have never been involved in a crash and that all of the original manufacturer's installation information is available, and it has not been recalled.
- Whether new or old, learn how to use your car seat before you have to put your baby into it. Have it set up and ready so you can practice.
 - Carefully review the manufacturer's information
 - Read the section about car seats in your car manual
- When possible, car seat bases should be installed by a Child Passenger Safety Seat Technician. You can locate a technician in your area by logging on to www.seatcheck.org and choosing "Inspection Location" or by calling 1-866-SEAT-CHECK.
- The National Highway Transportation Safety Administration's (NHTSA) website is a source of information about car seats and recalls. You can access a recall list online at www-odi.nhtsa.dot.gov/cars/problems/recalls/childseat.cfm
- Fill out the registration card that comes with the seat so that you are informed of any recalls.

Special Considerations

- During the winter months, you must be aware that the security of the car seat restraint system can be compromised when your infant is bundled in bulky clothing. Your baby should be dressed warmly in clothing that fits, secured in the car seat, and then covered with additional blankets or coverings as needed. Adding thick, fluffy padding in the car seat behind the baby can also make the car seat's restraint system less effective.
- Padding that is not part of the car seat's original construction should never be used behind or beneath an infant.
- Some accessories that can be bought for a car seat might not be appropriate for use. Neck rolls, head cushions, even toys that strap to the harness impose risks to the effectiveness of your car seat's design.
- Using accessories that do not originally come with the car seat may void the warranty of your car safety seat.

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You can find more information about car seat safety at these sites:

www.healthychildren.org - Sponsored by the American Academy of Pediatrics

www.nhtsa.dot.gov - National Highway Transportation Safety Administration

www.carseat.org - Website for SafetyBeltSafe USA, dedicated to child passenger safety

www.safekids.org - "Preventing injuries: At home, at play, and on the way"

www.cpsc.gov - U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission



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Car Seat Sense

Parents can be overwhelmed with the available car seat choices. Here are some guidelines to use when choosing a car safety seat for your infant so the seat you choose will keep your baby secure, appropriately positioned, and as safe as possible.

Car safety seats must meet strict Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard (FMVSS) 213. The car seat must also be the correct size for the infant who will use it. If you have a small or premature infant, you will need to choose a car seat that will fit your baby. **The car seat that is best for your baby is the one that fits your baby properly, fits your vehicle properly, and one that you will use correctly every time.**

The Massachusetts Child Passenger Safety Law requires that all children 12 years of age and under be properly restrained when traveling in a vehicle. This is a primary law, which means that a driver can be stopped by the police just for having a child under 12 who isn't buckled up. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has developed a policy statement regarding the safe transport of full-term newborns at hospital discharge, as well as one that addresses the needs of premature and low birth weight (small) infants. Both of these documents address the need for a properly sized car safety seat.

Choosing an Infant Car Safety Seat

Key Points

- An infant car seat, designed for infants as a rear-facing only car seat, is often the best choice for a baby.
- The car seat must have a label indicating it meets FMVSS 213.
- The car seat must be manufactured within the last 6 years.



Sizing

- The shoulder harness must be at or below the level of the shoulders to properly restrain an infant.
 - For a full-term baby, the lowest level of the shoulder harness should be no higher than 9 inches from the base.
 - For a premature or small infant, you should look for a car seat with multiple shoulder harness levels. A low shoulder harness height of 7 inches or less is more appropriate for a premature or small infant.
- The crotch strap position should fit close to the baby between the baby's legs and should not allow the legs to cross from one side to the other.
 - For a full-term baby, the crotch strap buckle must be no more than 5 ½ inches from the back of the seat.
 - For premature and small infants, look for seats that have a crotch strap buckle that is adjustable to 3 ½ inches from the back so it can be secured closer to the infant.

Features

- The restraint system must have a chest clip. This clip is positioned at the level of the axilla (arm pits).
- Many car safety seats have a 5-point restraint system. This type of seat includes a hip strap. The chest clip and harness buckle are positioned over the infant's chest and belly. For smaller babies, a large buckle and chest clip might get in the way of the baby's chin and neck.
- Some car seats come with shoulder and crotch pads. This padding might make it harder to properly secure the baby. Your baby's nurse can help you to see if these pads are a problem and should be removed.

Car Beds

- Car beds can also be used to transport infants. You may choose a car bed to transport your baby and delay traveling in a sitting position until your baby is older. Babies who do not tolerate a sitting position, babies who are too small to fit into a car seat, and babies with certain medical conditions may also benefit from traveling in a car bed. Your hospital health care provider may also discuss transporting your infant in a car bed. Car beds also need to meet FMVSS 213.

