THREE STEPS to Optimizing Child Passenger Safety Laws

Optimal occupant restraint laws need to include three provisions in order to be sure that all children are as well-protected as possible when riding in motor vehicles: child restraint use through age 8, seat belt use for all other passengers and rear seating for children to age 13.

**STEP ONE:**
Upgrade child restraint laws to include children through age 8. These laws are proven effective at getting children into age- and size-appropriate restraints that are effective in reducing risk of injury and death over seat belts alone.

- Children ages 4 through 7 in states with booster seat laws are 39 percent more likely to be appropriately restrained in a booster seat or child safety seat than children in states without such laws.
- Six- to 7-year-olds were much more likely to be appropriately restrained if the law included 4- through 7-year-olds, rather than only 4- to 5-year-olds.

**Effect of Booster Laws on Child Restraint Use Among 4- to 7-year-olds**

- Belt-positioning boosters are effective for children ages 4 through 7.
- Using a booster seat with a seat belt instead of using a seat belt alone for a child this age reduces the risk of injury by 59 percent.
- Child restraints, such as car seats and booster seats, reduce the risk of death by 28 percent for children ages 2 to 6, as compared with seat belts used alone.

Sources: JAMA, June 4, 2003; Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine, June 2006; updated assessment, 2008

**6-year-old in 35-mile-per-hour frontal crash**

First figure: While any restraint is better than none, a seat belt that does not fit properly can cause severe head, spine and abdominal injuries in a crash. Second figure: The booster seat corrects the fit of the seat belt on the child, reducing the risk of these types of injuries.

Sources: Partners for Child Passenger Safety data, 2007
STEP TWO
Upgrade laws to include primary seat belt laws in all seating positions. Research has shown that primary seat belt laws are more effective at getting adults and teens into seat belts than secondary laws. Children are more likely to be properly restrained for their age and size if the driver is buckled up.

Children ages 13 – 15 are more than twice as likely to be unrestrained in a secondary enforcement state as compared with a primary enforcement state.

Source: Accident Analysis and Prevention, March 2007

STEP THREE
Include rear-seat requirements for children age 12 and younger. Children are at a greater risk of injury in the front seat than in the rear seat. By restraining children (newborn through age 12) in the rear seat, you reduce their risk of injury in a crash by 38 percent.