

# Child Passenger Safety: What You Should Know Rear-Facing

## American Academy of Pediatrics Best Practice Recommendations for Transporting Children Younger Than 2 years of Age

*(Published in the April 2011 issue of Pediatrics)*

### The American Academy of Pediatrics Guidelines:

- ◆ All infants and toddlers should ride in a rear-facing car seat until they are 2 years of age or until they reach the highest weight or height allowed by the car seat's manufacturer.
- ◆ **All children should be restrained in the rear seat of the vehicle.**



### WHY?

- ◆ Children younger than age 2 are 75 percent less likely to die or to be severely injured in a crash if they are rear-facing.
- ◆ Children, ages 12 to 23 months, were over five times as likely to be injured when forward-facing compared to children of the same age secured rear-facing.
- ◆ A rear-facing car seat supports the head, neck and spine of infants and toddlers in a crash and distributes the crash force over the entire body.
- ◆ Children, up to age 2, placed in forward-facing child safety seats are 1.8 times more likely to be seriously injured than those secured in a rear-facing child safety seat.
- ◆ Twenty-one percent (21%) of the children in the U.S., who are less than one year of age or 20 pounds, are incorrectly seated forward-facing.

### More Information on Buckling Up Children Safely

- **Always** read the car seat instructions and the vehicle owner's manual.
- Car seat manufacturers recommend replacing car seats that have been in a crash. Check the car seat instructions for guidance on when a car seat needs to be replaced. Check with insurance companies regarding their crash replacement policy.
- Check the car seat label or the instructions for an expiration date or time frame. Car seats used beyond their life span are not considered safe.
- If you are unsure of how to use or install your car seat, in Pennsylvania you can contact the PA Traffic Injury Prevent Project at 1-800-CAR-BELT or [www.pakidstravelsafe.org](http://www.pakidstravelsafe.org) for information on fitting station locations.

## Pennsylvania Child Passenger Safety Law

All drivers are responsible for securing children in the appropriate child restraint system.

All children from birth up to age 4 must be secured in an approved child passenger restraint system anywhere in the vehicle.

- ◆ **A child younger than two years of age shall be secured in a rear-facing child passenger restraint system, to be used until the child outgrows the maximum weight and height limits designated by the car seat manufacturer. (Effective August 12, 2016)**

Violators are subject to a fine of \$75.00, plus Court Costs, \$45.00 Surcharge, \$10.00 EMS, and \$10.00 Administrative Costs.

**Total cost: \$140.00 + Court Costs.**

### Tips to Achieve Correct Use of a Rear-Facing Car Seat

- ✓ **Car Seat Selection**
  - Confirm the car seat is in good condition and has not been recalled.
  - Confirm the car seat has not met the manufacturer's designated expiration date.
  - Read the car seat instructions and/or label to make sure the car seat is appropriate for the child's age, weight and height.
- ✓ **Correct Direction**
  - Keep the child in a rear-facing car seat until age 2 or until they reach the maximum weight or height of the car seat. When the child outgrows the rear-facing car seat, secure the child in a forward-facing car seat.
- ✓ **Seating Location**
  - Secure all children younger than 13 years in the back seat of vehicles for best protection.
- ✓ **Tight Installation**
  - Thread and tighten the seat belt or lower connectors through the correct rear-facing belt path.
  - Confirm the car seat does NOT move side-to-side or front-to-back more than 1-inch when tested at the belt path.
- ✓ **Snug Harness**
  - Place the harness through the correct harness slots at or below the child's shoulders following the car seat manufacturer's instructions.
  - Secure the child with a snug harness. A snug harness does not permit excess webbing to be pinched at the shoulder or hips once the harness is buckled.
  - Place the harness retainer clip at armpit level.

## Rear-Facing



Secure children in a rear-facing car seat until 2 years of age or until the maximum weight or height allowed by the manufacturer of the car seat. Children younger than 1 year should always ride in a rear-facing car seat. Never place a rear-facing car seat in the front seat with an active passenger-side front air bag. All children younger than age 13 should ride in a back seat.

### Here's What to Do:

- ◆ Use a rear-facing car seat:
  - In the back seat for as long as possible.
  - Up to the rear-facing weight or height limits, even beyond the age of 2.
- ◆ If your child outgrows their rear-facing car seat before age 2, use a car seat with a higher weight and/or height limit to keep the child rear-facing longer.
- ◆ Leg crowding is expected and does not cause harm as long as the child is within the weight and height limits for the car seat.



## Rear-Facing

*Traveling rear-facing is 5 times safer than forward-facing.*

### Rear-Facing Checklist:

- Child's head is at least one-inch from the top of the shell of the car seat.
- Harness straps are positioned **at or below the shoulder**.
- Harness straps lay flat and fit snugly on the child with the harness retainer clip at armpit level.
- Seat belt or lower anchors in the correct belt path are locked and tight with less than one inch of side-to-side movement when pulled at the belt path.
- Read and follow the car seat manufacturer's instructions for an acceptable rear-facing recline angle. When checking the recline angle, the vehicle must be on level ground.

### Here's Why:

- ◆ The rear-facing car seat absorbs the crash forces.
- ◆ The head, neck, and spine are supported by the shell of the rear-facing car seat reducing harm to the child.
- ◆ Children younger than 2 years are more likely to be injured if they are secured forward-facing.

[www.pakidstravelsafe.org](http://www.pakidstravelsafe.org)  
1-800 CAR BELT

**Right Seat + Right Time + Right Use = Reducing Car Crash Injury.**

## Rear-Facing: Position the Shoulder Harness At or Below Child's Shoulders

*When a child is rear-facing the harness straps should be coming out of a slot **AT or BELOW** shoulder level.*

The correct position of the shoulder harness is **at or below** your child's shoulders. Correct shoulder harness height is critical to optimally securing the child and reducing the child's movement in the event of a sudden stop or impact.

### Incorrect Installation

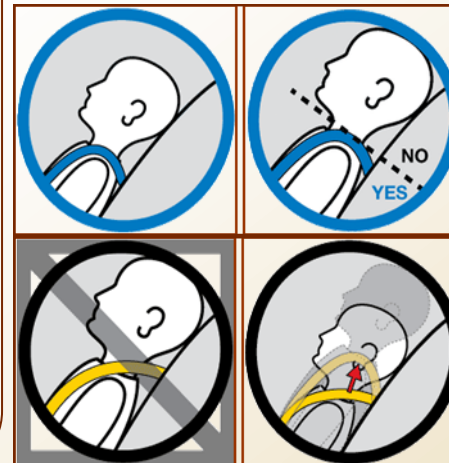
**The shoulder harness threaded in a slot above the child's shoulders when rear-facing will allow the child to move upwards in a frontal collision.** This could allow the child's torso to travel twice the distance compared to the proper positioning below the shoulders. (see illustration below) **Many parents do not realize that leaving shoulder harnesses positioned too high for their child has a similar effect as not fully tightening the harness.**

Most collisions happen when the car is moving forward. A rear-facing child's back is pressed against the seatback of the car seat in this type of crash, making it extremely important to keep the child's body from sliding upwards against the car seat's seatback.

**Any upward movement of the child influences the crash performance of a rear-facing car seat.** The additional distance the child moves increases the forces exerted on the child's body. The more a child's body moves in a crash, the more the child's head and chest are subjected to increased forces both at the beginning of the collision and while slowing down after the collision.

### Correct Installation

The harness straps are anchored snugly **at or below** a rear-facing child's shoulders, and better restrain the child from sliding upwards.



### Correct Position:

The harness straps are positioned snugly below the rear-facing child's shoulders, and hold them securely in place.

### Incorrect Position:

**DO NOT** use shoulder harness strap slots that are above the child's shoulders. In a rear-facing car seat, if the shoulder straps are too high they will not hold your child securely, allowing the child to slide upwards in a sudden stop or crash.