

DID YOU KNOW???

CAR SEAT KNOWLEDGE VITAL FOR CHILD SAFETY

For many years the loosely accepted standard for turning the rear-facing car seat to forward-facing was on or just after baby's first birthday. However, the American Academy of Pediatrics in the last several years has dropped that as a minimum age, updating its guidelines to recommend that babies remain in rear-facing safety seats in the back seat of vehicles until age two. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, AAA and other car-safety experts agree with that recommendation, citing research that shows one-year-olds are five times less likely to die or be seriously injured in a crash if they ride in a rear-facing car seat.

As of January 1st California law *requires* children under two to ride in a rear-facing car seat in the back seat until they reach at least 40 pounds or are at least 40 inches tall. The law also requires that children under age eight and under 57 inches must be secured in a car seat or booster seat in the back seat. While California law is not applicable in NYS, it reflects the findings of some of the recent studies that show rear-facing seats reduce head and neck movement in small children in the event of a crash, especially a front-impact collision. Such movement can lead to spinal and head injuries.

For those who might balk at keeping their one year-old in a rear-facing seat, Michael Molina, a community health educator at Children's Hospital of Orange County, California, cites videos and public service announcements that show the difference of how a car crash affects small children in front-facing vs. rear-facing car seats. "You can see [in the simulation] when a baby is rear-facing in a front-impact crash, there is almost little to no movement" of the head and neck, he says.

Parents often think their kids are uncomfortable, but they're not, according to Molina. "Kids are more flexible, their joints aren't fully formed yet; they don't get stiff the way we do. They can do the frog leg position, or put them up, and they're fine", says Molina.

If children turn two but are still under the height or weight limit for the seat, they should still be kept rear-facing. Age two is the minimum recommended age for children to ride rear-facing, and safety experts recommend children do so until they have grown to the height and weight limits of their car seat.

To answer the question as to when can a child graduate to a booster seat, safety advocates recommend keeping your child in each seat stage as long as possible. This is because with each switch, there's a reduction in the level of protection for your child. A child is ready for a booster seat when he or she has outgrown the weight or height limit of their forward-facing harnesses, which is typically 40 to 65 pounds.

Information contained in this article comes from Kathie Bozanich, a freelance writer/editor who worked for nearly three decades at the Los Angeles Times, and provided by the National Sheriff's Association and Sheriff Kevin Mulverhill. Credit and appreciation goes to all mentioned.