



NEWS RELEASE

Andy Skoogman, Director of Communications

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 25, 2009

CONTACT:

Nathan Bowie, 651-201-7571

Lisa Husom, 651-201-7570

MINNESOTA BOOSTER SEAT LAW TAKES EFFECT JULY 1

ST. PAUL — Minnesota children under age 8 and shorter than 4 feet 9 inches tall must be in a child safety seat or booster seat, effective July 1. Under the booster law, children cannot use a seat belt alone until they are age 8 or 4 feet 9 inches tall — whichever comes first. To ensure child safety, the Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS) recommends parents keep children in a booster based on their height, rather than their age.

DPS reports only 30 percent of Minnesota children use boosters. In the last five years in Minnesota, 2004–2008, 18 children passengers ages 4–8 were killed in crashes and 3,047 were injured.

Booster seats lift a child up allowing for proper seat belt fit — the lap belt low and snug across the hips and the shoulder belt snug across the middle of the chest. Typically children around age 4 and more than 40 pounds are ready for a booster, upon outgrowing a forward-facing child safety seat. Before the law takes effect, DPS officials are reminding parents and caregivers to secure a booster seat for children to be in compliance with the law. A booster seat citation is more than \$100.

“Boosters are common sense safety tools to ensure children are riding as safe as possible in a vehicle,” says Heather Darby, DPS child passenger safety coordinator. “Children who are shorter than 4 feet 9 simply aren’t tall enough to use a seat belt alone, if they do, a belt may do more damage than good in case of a crash.”

Child passenger safety officials say the importance of boosters is underscored by death and injuries associated with poor seat belt fit — including ejection, internal decapitation and serious abdominal damage.

The booster law further strengthens the state’s motor vehicle occupant protection laws, accompanying the primary seat belt law that went into effect June 9. The primary law means drivers and all passengers must be belted or in a child restraint to avoid being stopped and ticketed by law enforcement.

—MORE—

New Booster Seat Law

Page 2

June 25, 2009

444 Cedar Street, Suite 155 • Saint Paul, Minnesota 55101-5155 • www.dps.state.mn.us

Alcohol
and Gambling
Enforcement

Bureau of Criminal
Apprehension

Driver
and Vehicle
Services

Emergency
Communication
Networks

Homeland Security
and Emergency
Management

Minnesota
State Patrol

Office of
Communications

Office of
Justice Programs

Office of
Traffic Safety

State Fire Marshal

Darby says children are not ready to ride in a seat belt alone until they can sit with their back against the vehicle seat, knees bent completely over the seat and feet touching the floor. Darby says a sign that a seat belt does not fit properly is if the child wraps the shoulder belt behind them to avoid the belt rubbing against their neck.

Darby notes that parents must be aware of the restraint steps a child should progress through as they grow: rear-facing infant seats, forward-facing toddler seats, booster seats, and seat belts — all of which are effective and necessary.

Since 1991, a majority — 86 percent — of around 35,000 children involved in crashes who were properly restrained were not injured and 13 percent sustained only minor injuries. In Minnesota, three out of every four child restraints are used incorrectly — meaning children are riding in the wrong restraint or the restraint is not properly secured. In the last five years, 2004–2008, 44 vehicle occupants under age 10 were killed on Minnesota roads and 32 of the victims were not in child restraints, or the restraint was used improperly.

DPS reports the following as the most common child passenger safety mistakes:

- Turning a child from a rear-facing restraint to a forward-facing restraint too soon.
- Restraint is not secured tight enough — it should not shift more than one inch side-to-side or out from the seat.
- Harness on the child is not tight enough — if you can pinch harness material, it's too loose.
- Retainer clip is up too high or too low — should be at the child's armpit level.
- The child is in the wrong restraint — don't rush your child into a seat belt.

Parents are encouraged to visit www.buckleupkids.state.mn.us to download booster seat and child passenger safety resources. Also available online is the “Buckle Up Kids” and “Don't Skip a Step” brochures that provide detail on how to properly secure a child in a vehicle.

###

Editor's Note: *To schedule an interview with a child passenger safety expert in your area or find up-coming safety seat clinics to attend, visit www.buckleupkids.state.mn.us/ots, or contact Nathan.Bowie@state.mn.us or Lisa.Husom@state.mn.us.*