



## NEWS RELEASE

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**IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **BIG JUMP IN BOOSTER SEAT USE RESULTS IN 1,000 CHILDREN NOT INJURED IN CRASHES IN LAST YEAR**

*National Child Passenger Safety Week Runs through Sept. 25*

ST. PAUL — Since Minnesota's strengthened child passenger safety law became effective July 1, 2009, crash data reveal a significant increase in booster seats — seat lifts that help adult seat belts fit children properly. The Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS) Office of Traffic Safety is underscoring the need for parents to ensure all children are in the proper restraint based on their size during National Child Passenger Safety Week, September 19–25.

During 2007–2009, DPS reports only 44 percent of booster-age (4–7) children involved in crashes were in booster seats. In the year since the law became effective (July 1, 2009–June 30, 2010), 59 percent of children in crashes were in boosters — translating to more than 1,000 children in booster seats who suffered no injury.

“Booster seats are a critical step to ensure a child's safety in a vehicle,” says Heather Darby, DPS child passenger safety coordinator. “While many parents may think dealing with child seats are a pain, I can't think of any greater pain than losing a child in a crash.”

Boosters are for children who have outgrown a forward-facing seat, usually starting around 40 pounds and age 4. Under the state's law, a child cannot be secured in only a seat belt until they are 8 years old or 4 feet 9 inches tall — whichever comes first. It is strongly recommended, however, to keep a child in a booster until they are 4 feet 9 inches tall.

Lack of booster seat use results in poor seat belt fit that can contribute to serious injury and ejection from a vehicle in the event of a traffic crash. Darby says a sign that a seat belt does not fit properly and a booster is needed is if a child wraps the shoulder belt behind them to avoid the belt rubbing against their neck or crossing their face. Belts should be low and snug across the hips; shoulder straps should never be tucked under an arm or behind the back.

The fine for booster seat non-use is \$50, but can cost more than \$100 with administrative fees.

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Darby says National Child Passenger Safety week — and the back-to-school period — is an ideal time for parents to check their car seats to make sure their child is riding safely and properly. She stresses for parents to become aware of the restraint steps a child should progress through as they age and grow:

- Rear-facing infant seats — infants until at least one year and 20 pounds.
- Forward-facing toddler seats — 1 to 4 years old.
- Booster seats — Starting after children have outgrown the forward-facing toddler seat, usually after turning age 4, and is recommended until they are 4 feet 9 inches tall.
- Seat belts — Over 8 years old or 4 feet 9 inches tall.
- Children should ride in the back seat until age 12; if riding in the front seat, passenger-side airbags should be turned off.

Parents should also be aware of the most common child passenger safety mistakes:

- Turning a child from a rear-facing restraint to a forward-facing restraint too soon.
- Restraint not secured tight enough — the seat should not shift more than one inch side-to-side or out from the vehicle's 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 — children must progress through different restraints as they age and grow.

Parents and caregivers are encouraged to learn more at the DPS website, [www.buckleupkids.state.mn.us](http://www.buckleupkids.state.mn.us) for materials including the “Buckle Up Kids” and “Don't Skip a Step” brochures that provide detail on how to properly secure a child in a vehicle.

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**Editor's Note:** *To arrange an interview with a child passenger safety expert in your area, contact [Nathan.Bowie@state.mn.us](mailto:Nathan.Bowie@state.mn.us) or 651-201-7571.*

*Stations encouraged to download and broadcast child passenger safety TV and radio PSAs during this period, available here:*

<https://mndeptpublicsafety.sharefile.com/d/s149bfb6c31b4a169>