

# Parents – Is Your Child Riding Safely?

If your child is not yet eight years old, he or she probably needs to use a special seat when he or she rides in a motor vehicle. Unfortunately, a lot of parents and caregivers place children in the wrong size child safety seat or in a safety belt before it is safe to do so.



The following guidelines will help you to make sure you are correctly transporting your child. For more information, please visit the NHTSA Web site at [www.nhtsa.dot.gov](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov). And remember — when placing a child safety seat or booster seat in your car or truck, be sure to read the instructions so you install and use the seat correctly. Also, look at your vehicle's owner's manual to see what it says about installing and using child safety seats and booster seats.



- Use rear-facing child safety seats for infants from birth to at least 1 year old, and to at least 20 pounds.
- Use forward-facing child safety seats for children who are at least age 1 to about age 4, and weigh 20 to 40 pounds.
- A child who is about age 4 to about age 8, and under 4' 9" tall, and who has outgrown a forward-facing safety seat should use a booster seat with a lap-shoulder belt. A booster seat raises a child up so the seat belt fits correctly.

**All children age 12 and under should ride in the back seat.**

- A child who is about 8 years old or over 4-feet 9-inches tall can use a seat belt. The lap belt should rest low and snug across the child's upper thighs, and the shoulder belt should be centered on the shoulder and across the chest. The child should also be able to sit all the way back against the vehicle seat back with his or her knees bent comfortably over the edge of the seat.

LATCH (Lower Anchors and Tethers for Children) is a new system for installing child safety seats (not booster seats, car beds, or vests) without safety belts. Attachments on LATCH-equipped child safety seats fasten to anchors in LATCH-equipped vehicles. Most child safety seats and cars, minivans, and light trucks **manufactured after September 1, 2002**, are required to have LATCH.

LATCH works like this: a LATCH-equipped vehicle has at least two sets of small bars, called "anchors," located in the lower rear seat where the cushions meet the seat back. A LATCH-equipped child safety seat has a lower set of attachments that look like hooks, buckles or snaps. The lower attachments on the child safety seat connect to the lower anchors in the vehicle. Most forward-facing child safety seats **also** have an adjustable upper "tether" strap that has a hook at the end. This hook attaches to an additional upper anchor in the vehicle.

If your child's safety seat is not LATCH-equipped, **it is still safe if:** it has been correctly installed using a seat belt; it hasn't been recalled; and it hasn't been damaged in a crash. Child safety seats that don't have LATCH should be installed using seat belts, even in LATCH-equipped vehicles.

If your vehicle is not LATCH-equipped, you can still use a safety belt to safely install any child safety seat – even one with LATCH. Be sure to follow the instructions in your vehicle owner's manual and in the child safety seat instruction booklet. You can also call the toll-free DOT Auto Safety Hotline at 1-888-327-4236.

Remember, children are safest when properly restrained in the back seat. For a child safety seat inspection by a certified technician, call 1-866-732-8243 (1-866-SEAT-CHECK) or visit [www.seatcheck.org](http://www.seatcheck.org).

For more information about LATCH, child safety seats and traffic safety, visit [www.nhtsa.dot.gov](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov) or call the DOT Auto Safety Hotline at 1-888-327-4236.

