



Jackson County Department of Public Health

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Child Passenger Safety Week is September 17-23 Safe Kids Jackson County Reminds Parents and Caregivers to Keep Kids Safe

Every year, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) partners with local communities to hold Child Passenger Safety Week, which runs this year from September 17-23. NHTSA's mission is to save lives on our nation's roads, and it starts with our youngest passengers. Child Passenger Safety Week, which always ends with National Seat Check Saturday, exists to increase awareness for parents and caregivers about the importance of correctly buckling kids in the right seats for their age and size. We want this awareness to remain year-round.

Motor vehicle crashes are a leading cause of death for children, and the latest research from NHTSA shows that 46% of car seats are misused. Common issues are children being in the wrong type of car seat for their age and size, and car seats being installed improperly — both of which leave children vulnerable to injury in a crash. Sadly, two children under 13 were killed every day in 2021 while riding in vehicles, and another estimated 318 were injured. "Most parents are trying to do their best for their kids," said Martha Thomasson, Coordinator for Safe Kids Jackson County, "so they may be surprised to find out their kids aren't as safe as possible in their vehicle. We want caregivers to know that it's worth finding out for sure."

Talk to an Expert

All over the country, and even here in Jackson County, there are certified Child Passenger Safety Technicians who help educate parents and caregivers about the right seats for their kids and help them learn how to install the seats correctly. The Jackson County Department of Public Health employs five CPS Technicians on staff. Visit www.nhtsa.gov/equipment/car-seats-and-booster-seats#install-inspection for additional technicians available in your area. Some locations offer virtual seat checks and Spanish-speaking technicians. If a technician is available near you, make an appointment to get your car seats checked. An expert will let you know if your children are in the right seats for their ages and sizes, walk you through proper installation for your vehicle, and explain the importance of registering car seats with the manufacturer so you can be notified if there is a recall.

"People check their tire pressure and change the oil in their vehicles, but neglect to check the equipment that's meant to protect their kids in a crash," Thomasson added. "Don't wait for a crash to happen to find out if your child's seat is installed correctly. At that point, it's too late," she said, "Let a professional check it for you so you can have that peace of mind."



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According to NHTSA, more than a third of children 12 and younger who died in crashes in 2021 in cars, pickups, vans, and SUVs were unbuckled. “Number one rule: Never let your children ride unbuckled — not even on a short trip,” said Thomasson.

A Mindset Shift

One of the most common mistakes parents and caregivers make with car seats is being eager to move their children to the next seat or position before they’re ready. We want to shift the mindset from “Can I move them out of this seat or position yet?” to “How long can they safely stay in this seat or position?” Keep children rear-facing as long as possible, up to the top height or weight allowed by their particular seats. The recommendations are based on decades of research that have shown the safest way for children to ride in vehicles. Once a child outgrows a rear-facing car seat, he or she is ready to travel in a forward-facing car seat with a harness. A forward-facing car seat must always be installed using the seat’s top tether; it keeps the seat from moving forward in a crash. Only after outgrowing the forward-facing car seat — which is longer than most parents think — a child should be buckled in a booster seat until tall enough to fit in an adult seat belt properly.

As their kids get older parents might get some pushback about their car seat, booster seat, or seat belt, but child passenger laws exist for a reason: to save lives. In 2021 alone, the 4- to 7-year-old age group had the highest number of fatalities (246) among children in passenger vehicles, followed by the 8- to 12-year-old age group (241 fatalities). Booster seats are a critical — but often misunderstood — step between harness car seats and adult seat belts. Remember that seat belts were designed to protect adult passengers — not kids. If the seat belt doesn’t fit your child correctly, it won’t offer them the optimal protection in a crash.

Once your child is ready to use a seat belt, ensure that it fits correctly and that they wear it properly; don’t let them slip the shoulder belt behind their back. No matter what, the safest place for all kids under 13 is buckled up in the back seat.

Bigger Isn’t Safer

You might think that a bigger vehicle offers better protection for your child, but this just isn’t true. In 2021, more than a third (37%) of the children killed while riding in light pickup trucks were unrestrained, followed closely by SUVs (36%), passenger cars (36%), and vans (34%). Whatever type of vehicle you have, children are safest when correctly secured in the right car seats or booster seats for their ages and sizes. The size of your vehicle doesn’t change the fact that all kids need to be properly buckled in the right seat, every trip.

Find Out More

NHTSA encourages everyone who drives child passengers to check out its free, online resources at www.nhtsa.gov/TheRightSeat.



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- [Car Seat Types](#): Determine whether your child fits best in a rear-facing car seat, forward-facing car seat, booster seat, or seat belt.
- [Car Seat Recommendations](#): Review NHTSA's recommendations for the best car seat for your child's age and size.
- [Find and Compare](#): Find and compare car seats with NHTSA's handy car seat finder, which also searches specific brands.
- Download NHTSA's [SaferCar app](#) and save your vehicle and car seat info in your "virtual garage." If any of your saved equipment is included in a safety recall, the app will send you a notification.

Safe Kids Jackson County will hold two child safety seat check events during September in recognition of Child Passenger Safety Week and Seat Check Saturday. The first child safety seat check will be held at the Jackson County Community Baby Shower event on Wednesday, September 20, from 3-6 PM in the lobby of the Jackson County Department of Public Health. The second child safety seat check will happen at Mountain Heritage Day on September 30 at Western Carolina University. Safe Kids volunteers will be set up near the Running Cedar Creek Children's area.

For more information on child car seat safety, as well as how to find car seat check events, go to www.nhtsa.gov/TheRightSeat or call Martha Thomasson, Safe Kids Jackson County Coordinator at 828-587-8257.

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