



# Keeping your child safe in the car: new recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics

**THE EXPERTS ARE BUCKLING DOWN ON THE WAYS THAT** children buckle up. The leading cause of death among children is car crashes, prompting the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) to update its recommendations on car seats:

- Children should ride in rear-facing car seats until age 2, or until they reach the maximum height and weight for their seat.
- Children should ride in belt-positioning booster seats until they have reached 4 feet 9 inches tall and are between 8 and 12 years of age.

These changes are supported by research that shows that using rear-facing seats has been effective at reducing injuries and death. Children under age 2 are 75 percent less likely to die or be severely injured in a crash if they are riding rear-facing, according to a study by the journal *Injury Prevention*.

The new recommendations also clarify the importance of meeting height and weight requirements rather than age requirements before transitioning to the next car seat stage.

“Parents often look forward to transitioning from one stage to the next, but these transitions should generally be delayed until they’re necessary, when the child fully outgrows the limits for his or her current stage,” said Dennis Durbin, MD, FAAP, lead author of the AAP’s policy statement and accompanying technical report.

“A rear-facing child safety seat does a better job of supporting the head, neck and spine of infants and toddlers in a crash, because it distributes the force of the collision over the entire body,” Dr. Durbin said. “For larger children, a forward-facing seat with a harness is safer than a booster, and a belt-positioning booster seat provides better protection than a seat belt alone until the seat belt fits correctly.”



### Booster basics

- Children should not transition from a rear-facing seat to a forward-facing seat with a harness until they reach the maximum weight or height for that seat.
- A booster will make sure the vehicle’s lap-and-shoulder belt fit properly.
- The shoulder belt should lie across the middle of the chest and shoulder, not near the neck or face.
- The lap belt should fit low and snug on the hips and upper thighs, not across the belly.
- Most children will need a booster seat until they have reached 4 feet 9 inches tall and are between 8 and 12 years old.
- Children should ride in the rear of a vehicle until they are 13 years old.

Of course, it’s important to be sure your car seat or booster seat is installed correctly, whatever your child’s age. In many communities, local fire departments and hospitals offer free car seat installation and safety checks. To find resources in your neighborhood, visit [www.seatcheck.org](http://www.seatcheck.org). ❖