

Frequently asked car seat questions and answers

Q. How do I check to see if my car seat/booster seat has been recalled?

A. 1. You can attend a car seat check run by Child Passenger Safety Technicians. Saint Luke's Hospital and Saint Luke's Northland have car seat checks. Call NurseLine at 816-932-6220 to schedule your appointment.

2. Call DOT hotline toll-free at 888-327-4236, Monday – Friday, 8:00 A.M. to 10:00 P.M. ET.

3. You may also check for recall online, at www.odi.nhtsa.dot.gov Look on your child's car seat/booster seat for the manufacture name, model number, and date of manufacture. Check under the manufacturer of your child's seat and see if the model number and date of manufacture match any of the recalls. If they do, follow the instructions listed on the recall. If not, your child safety seat is currently not recalled.

Q. How long can I use my car seat?

A. The Juvenile Product Manufacture Association (JPMA) recommends not using a car seat older than 6 years of age.

Q. May I use a borrowed/used car seat?

A. The following steps will help you determine if you wish to use a “second hand” seat. If you can continue through the questions successfully, it may be safe to use the seat. The decision is always up to the parent or guardian. When in doubt, do not use the seat. Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for our children, and the purchase of a new safety seat may be the REAL bargain!

Q. How do I install my car seat/booster seat correctly?

A. You need both the owner's manual for your vehicle and your child's car seat instructions for complete and proper installation.

Q. Where do I find the closest fitting station?

A. To find a fitting station near you, go to www.seatcheck.org or www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/childps/contacts.

Q. May I use my car seat/booster seat if it has been in a crash?

A. If a car seat/booster seat is in a crash, it must be replaced. Do not use it again! A crash can cause damage to the seat that cannot be seen. Continued use may cause injury or even death to your child.

Q. Why should I register my car seat?

A. Registering your child's car seat tells the manufacturer that you own that particular seat. If there is a recall of that seat in the future, the manufacturer will notify you and will send replacement parts/kit as needed to fix your seat.

Q. How do I know which type of car seat to use for my child?

A. The right seat for your child fits your child (both weight and height guidelines—see instructions/labels on seat), fits your vehicle, and is easy for you to use correctly every time. Refer to handout on website “Selecting the Right Car Seat”. It explains each stage of child safety seat use for your child.

Q. What is a booster seat?

A. Booster seats are used for children who have outgrown their child safety seat, but are not large enough for the vehicle seat belt system. The booster seat simply lifts the child up, so the seat belt fits them properly—lap belt is snug across upper thighs and shoulder belt is snug across the chest. They come with high-backs or no-backs. For the best protection, children should use booster seats until they are 4-feet-9-inches tall.

Q. When should children ride in the front seat?

A. All children less than 13 years of age should ride in the back seat for the safest ride. If you must place an older child in the front seat, make sure the vehicle seat back is all the way back and the child is properly restrained for age and size, to prevent injury from the air bag in the event of a crash.

Q. What is the correct way a child should fit in the car seat that has harness straps?

A. For rear facing car seat, harness straps need to come out at or below child’s shoulders, chest clip at armpit level, and straps snug—unable to pinch up harness at shoulder. For forward facing car seat, harness straps need to come out at or above child’s shoulders, in reinforced slot (see car seat manual), chest clip at armpit level and straps snug—unable to pinch up harness at shoulder.

Q. I bought a head rest and harness strap covers to use with my child’s car seat. Is that okay?

A. The only products you can add to a car seat are ones made by the same manufacturer as your car seat. Other products, i.e. aftermarket products, not made by the manufacturer, like head rests, harness strap covers, liners for car seat, etc., should not be used. Aftermarket products may alter the fit of the baby in the car seat, adding extra padding between the baby and the car seat, where the baby does not fit as snug. Harness strap covers push the chest clip down, so it does not fit properly at armpit level.

For more information, check out the “Car Safety Seat: A Guide for Families” at www.aap.org/family/carseatguide.htm.