

# Following California Laws will Keep Your Child Safe in the Car



Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for children ages 1 through 14 years old, killing over 1,000 children each year. Protect against this tragedy by properly securing your child in a vehicle. California law requires everyone to be properly secured when riding in a motor vehicle.

## California Law BIRTH TO 16 YEARS

**Children under 2 years old must be rear facing** in a car seat unless they weigh 40 pounds or more, or are 40 inches tall or more. **Effective January 1, 2017.**

**Children under age 8** must be properly buckled into a car seat or a booster in the back seat.

**Children age 8 or older**, or who are 4'9" or taller, may use the vehicle seat belt if it fits properly with the lap belt low on the hips, touching the upper thighs, and the shoulder belt crossing the center of the chest. If children are not tall enough for proper belt fit, they must ride in a booster or car seat.

**Exemptions:** A child under age 8 may ride in an appropriate restraint system in the front seat if:

- There is no rear seat.
- The rear seats are side-facing jump seats.
- The rear seats are rear-facing seats.
- The car seat or booster cannot be installed properly in the rear seat.
- All rear seats are already occupied by children seven years of age or under.
- Medical reasons require that a child cannot ride in the rear seat. Proof of the child's medical condition may be required.
- However, a child cannot be transported in a rear-facing car seat in the front seat that is equipped with an active frontal passenger airbag.

## Protect your child – IT IS THE LAW!

### Fines & Penalties

In California, for each child under 16 who is not properly secured, parents (if in the car) or drivers can be fined more than **\$500** and get a point on their driving records.

## Rear-Facing Car Seats

Children under the age of 2 are required to ride in a **REAR-FACING** car seat in the back seat; as recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics. Rear facing is 5 times safer than forward facing. Car seat manufacturers recommend that children remain in a rear-facing car seat until they reach the top height or weight limit allowed. Most children will outgrow an infant carrier seat before age 1. The next step is a convertible seat which starts out rear facing and converts to a forward-facing seat when the child reaches the upper height or weight limits.



**Car Seat Installation Tips** – Once a child is placed in the car seat, be sure that the harness straps are snug and can not be pinched, that the chest clip is at armpit level, and that the car seat is tightly secured and does not move more than an inch from side to side. For rear-facing car seats, the harness straps are even with or below the shoulder and when the car seat is forward facing, the harness straps are even with or above the shoulders.

## Forward-Facing Car Seats



Keep your child in a **FORWARD-FACING** car seat (either a "convertible" or "combination") with a harness until your child reaches the top height or weight limit allowed by the car seat's manufacturer. Many forward-facing seats must be used with a top tether.

A combination seat converts from a 5-point harness into a booster seat when your child is ready. Once your child outgrows the forward-facing car seat with a harness, it is time to travel in a **BOOSTER SEAT**, but still in the back seat.

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## Boosters & Beyond

**BOOSTER SEATS** elevate your child so that the shoulder strap fits comfortably across the chest, the lap belt stays low over the hips, and the knees bend over the seat edge. Keep your children in a **BOOSTER SEAT** until they are big enough to fit in a seat belt properly.



The right car seat or booster fits your child and your car, and is one you will use correctly every time you travel.

Your children can fit an adult **SEAT BELT** when they are able to stay properly seated on every trip and:

- Sit all the way back in the seat with their knees bending at the edge of the seat;
- Have the lap belt stay low on their hips, touching the upper thighs; and
- Have the shoulder belt cross the center of their chest and not ride on their neck or face.



All children are safest, properly restrained and in **the back seat until age 13.**

**Never** place the shoulder belt under the arm or behind the back.

California law **prohibits smoking** in a motor vehicle when a minor (17 years old and under) is present. A violation is punishable by a fine of up to \$100.



## Car Seat Questions & Installation Help

**Certified Child Passenger Safety Technicians** are available to check your car seat installation for free. For car seat questions and general information, or for an inspection station near you, go to [www.safercar.gov/cpsApp/cps/index.htm](http://www.safercar.gov/cpsApp/cps/index.htm) or use the California directory of child passenger safety services at [www.cdph.ca.gov/vosp](http://www.cdph.ca.gov/vosp) and click on "Who's Got Car Seats?" to **contact your local health department.**



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## Dangers In & Around Cars & Kaitlyn's Law

**It is against California law** to leave a child who is 6 years of age or younger alone in the car without the supervision of a person at least 12 years old if:

1. The keys are in the ignition or the car is running, or
2. There is a significant risk to the child.

**Children are most at risk of being injured** when vehicles are moving forward or backing out of a driveway. Know the blind zones of your vehicle.

**Look Before You Lock** to be sure you have not left a child in the back seat. Heatstroke as a result of a child being left in a vehicle is a terrible tragedy.

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