



American Academy of Pediatrics' New Car Seat Guidelines for Children

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Once children turn one, parents often eagerly to turn them around in their car seats so they're riding in front-facing positions. This can provide parents with an easier way to monitor their kids while they're driving. *However*, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recently issued new guidelines that clearly oppose that practice. The new guidelines tell caregivers to keep their infants (and all children under the age of 13) in the most protective and appropriate car seats or strapped-in positions possible until they're older.

In fact, the AAP now states that infants should remain in their car seats, facing backwards, until they either turn two *or* actually attain the *maximum* height and weight specified on their car seats. This new standard is set forth in the April 2011 issue of the journal *Pediatrics*. Furthermore, children up through four years of age should be kept in forward-facing car seats. Belt-positioning "booster seats" are still required for most kids through their eighth year of life.

The new guidelines further indicate that most kids should remain in booster seats until they reach a minimum height of four feet and nine inches *and* fall between the ages of eight and twelve. Once youngsters have outgrown their booster seats, they should always wear lap-and-shoulder belts in the *rear* seats of cars. Children should not start riding in the front seats of cars until they are at least 13 years old.

Car Seat Guidelines Prior to 2002 and the Need for Change

Prior to these new guidelines, parents tended to move their infants out of their rear-facing car seat positions once they weighed 20 pounds or reached 12 months of age. However, accidents in recent years have clearly demonstrated the need for more protective guidelines, especially for infants. Dennis Durbin, MD, FAAP, the lead author of the American Academy of Pediatrics' new policy statement and supporting technical report puts it this way, "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's position is further supported by a 2007 study quoted in an issue of the *Injury Prevention* journal. That study found that "children under age two are 75% less likely to die or be severely injured in a crash if they are riding rear-facing."

Too Many Children Still Die in Car Accidents

Even though the number of children below the age of 16 dying in car accidents has dropped significantly since the late 1990s, far too many of them still perish in this manner each year. In fact, if you include all children age 21 and younger, more than 5,000 youths die in car accidents each year. Furthermore, car accidents continue to annually claim the lives of more children (ages four and older) than any other cause. When you add in the hundreds of children seriously harmed in such accidents each year, the statistics take on even grimmer proportions.

Hopefully, these striking statistics will motivate all parents to begin immediately following the AAP's new, somewhat stricter guidelines. Children's lives are at stake.

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