

Child Passenger Safety Week: September 12 – 18
By Liz Pickett

For many new parents, bringing baby home from the hospital means that there must be a car seat (child passenger safety seat or restraint) already installed in the care in order to take baby home. This means that expectant parents need to know about car seats long before baby's due date! And when they do go out to shop for a car seat, they may find themselves overwhelmed and confused by all of the different types of restraints available. There are a wide array of different types such as infant rear-facing, forward-facing, five-point harness, convertible, booster seats, and more! This means that parents-to-be must do some research. A great website to visit is the national Highway Traffic Safety Administration's at www.nhtsa.dot.gov.

There they will learn that infants should always be in an infant, rear-facing restraint. They will also learn that depending on the make and model of the restraint and type of car that it will be installed in, the LATCH (this stands for Lower Anchors and Tethers for Child Restraints) system or the seat belt may be used. LATCH systems are in cars made after 2002, and cars built prior to 2002 use the seat belt to secure the child restraint seat.

It is important that your child is in the appropriate seat for his age and weight. To be sure that you are buying the right seat, always check the manufacturer's instructions for upper and lower weight and height limits. Keep in mind the rear-facing position is safest, so children should ride facing the rear for as long as possible, but never exceed the manufacturer's weight and height limits.

Remember that children should never ride in a vehicle without being in a properly installed restraint. Restraints are designed to contact the body at the strongest parts of its structure, the hips and shoulders. Since infants and toddlers are very different in size, the appropriate size restraint is very important. Child restraints help the child's body to slow down with the crash, extending the time in which the forces are felt by the child. The head and spinal cord are protected by keeping them away from the hard interior surface of the vehicle.

The best thing to do is to take your car and the child passenger restraint to a car seat clinic in your community. They are free of charge and a Certified Child Passenger Safety Technician will examine the seat and your vehicle, so remember to take the seat's installation manual with you. The FCPA technician will show you how to properly install your seat, not install it for you. The technician's job is to educate you on how you can safely and properly install your seat so that you can do it yourself. Many parents have to switch car seats between two or more vehicles, so it is of the utmost importance that you can install it properly on your own.

For more information on child restraints or child passenger safety, visit www.safeny.com. It provides a schedule of upcoming car seat clinics where you can bring your child, restraint, and vehicle to make sure you have the proper seat and that it is installed correctly.