

Staying Safe – On the Road

[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC—safer, healthier people.

[Susan Laird] Are you planning to head out on the road this season? CDC's Injury Center wants to help keep you and your family safe and healthy, whether you're planning a lengthy road trip or just traveling around town.

Laurie Beck, an epidemiologist from CDC's Injury Center, is joining us to talk about staying safe on the roads. Thanks for being here today, Laurie.

[Laurie Beck] Thanks for having me.

[Susan Laird] What's the main thing that anyone who gets on the road in a vehicle at any time of year needs to remember?

[Laurie Beck] If there's one thing drivers and passengers should always do, it's buckle up. Wearing your seat belt can reduce your risk of dying in a crash by about half. In 2006, more than 32,000 people were killed in crashes while riding in motor vehicles, and about half of those who died weren't using a seat belt, car seat or booster seat.

When traveling with kids, adults should make sure their passengers, age 12 years and younger, ride in the back seat and make sure that everyone is buckled into the appropriate car seat, booster seat, or adult seat belt for every ride. Hundreds of children who die in vehicle crashes each year aren't buckled up.

[Susan Laird] That's really scary. Are there guidelines to help parents know which type of car seat or booster seat is best for their child and how to use them safely?

[Laurie Beck] Yes. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has materials to help adults use car and booster seats the right way. They also have information on when to know that your child is ready to use a seat belt without a booster seat. Their guidelines can really help parents and caregivers know how to transport kids the safest way possible.

Typically, babies should be placed in rear facing car seats until they're at least one year old *and* weigh at least twenty pounds. When babies out grow their rear facing seats, they graduate into forward-facing car seats.

This isn't necessary right away- kids are still safe in rear-facing seats, as long as they fit the manufacturer's size and weight recommendations. But, when parents *do* move their babies into front-facing car seats, they should keep them in these seats until at least age four *or* until they weigh at least forty pounds. Some front-facing car seats are made to safely and comfortably hold a child up to 50 or 60 pounds. So, parents don't necessarily have to move their child to a booster seat *right* at age four or forty pounds- that's just a minimum guideline.

Booster seats are designed for children from about age 4 up to age 8 or until they are up to 4 feet 9 inches tall. When your child is properly fitted in a booster seat, the shoulder belt should cross his or her chest and rest snugly on the shoulder. The lap belt should rest low across the hip and upper thigh – never across the stomach area.

[Susan Laird] So, other than age and height, how can a parent tell that their child is ready to graduate out of the booster seat?

[Laurie Beck] You'll know your child's ready for a regular seat belt when he can sit against the back of the seat and can bend his knees over the edge of the seat.

At this stage, your child can safely buckle up with a regular seat belt. But to be sure they're safe, remember to have them ride in the back seat until they're at least 12 years old.

These are meant to be helpful guidelines. There are a lot of numbers to keep straight and a lot of stages to remember. But parents can find these guidelines and more at boosterseat.gov.

[Susan Laird] We're always concerned about young drivers with limited experience. What can parents do to help their teen drivers stay safe?

[Laurie Beck] There are proven ways to reduce teen drivers' risk on the roads. Graduated driver licensing-- or GDL—systems can help make your teen a safer driver. Graduated licensing is a three-step process developed to allow them to get their initial experience under low-risk driving conditions. GDL laws differ by state, but the primary goal and format is the same across the country. Parents can learn about and enforce their state's GDL laws. They should set rules about where, when, and with whom their kids can drive. There are also teen-parent contracts available to help parents negotiate safe behavior rules with their teen driver.

[Susan Laird] Where can someone find out more about GDL laws?

[Laurie Beck] Information on GDL, including what the laws are in each state, can be found on the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/injury, or you can contact your state's Division of Motor Vehicles or Driver Services.

[Susan Laird] It sounds like there are steps we can all take to stay safer on the roads. Thanks for your time today, Laurie. Remember, for more information on staying safe, whether on the road or anywhere else, visit www.cdc.gov/injury.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.