

Keeping Young Children Safe In Cars

(StatePoint) New advice from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) is changing the way parents buckle up their children for a drive.

Parents now are being advised to keep toddlers in rear-facing car seats until age 2, or until they reach the maximum height and weight for their seat, according to a new policy published in the medical journal "Pediatrics." Additionally, children should ride in belt-positioning booster seats until they have reached 4 feet 9 inches tall and are between 8 and 12 years of age.

The previous AAP policy, from 2002, instructed that it was safest for infants and toddlers to ride rear-facing up to the limits of the car seat, but it also cited age 12 months and 20 pounds as a minimum. As a result, many parents turned the seat to face the front of the car when their child celebrated his or her first birthday.

"Parents often look forward to transitioning from one stage to the next, but when it comes to car seats, these transitions should be delayed until the child fully outgrows the seat," said pediatrician Dennis Durbin, MD, FAAP, lead author of the policy statement and accompanying technical report.

"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 said.

While the rate of deaths in motor vehicle crashes in children under age 16 has decreased substantially -- dropping 45 percent between 1997 and 2009 -- it is still the leading cause of death for children ages 4 and older. Counting children and teens up to age 21, there are more than 5,000 deaths each year.

Children should transition from a rear-facing seat to a forward-facing seat with a harness, and stay in that seat until they reach the maximum weight or height for it. There are three types of rear-facing car safety seats:



Children should be placed rear-facing until the age of 2.

infant-only seats, convertible seats, and 3-in-1 seats. When children reach the highest weight or length allowed by the manufacturer of their infant-only seat, they should continue to ride rear-facing in a convertible seat or 3-in-1 seat.

After that, a booster seat should be used to make sure the vehicle's lap-and-shoulder belt fits properly. The shoulder belt should lie across the middle of the chest and shoulder, not near the neck or face. The lap belt should fit low and snug on the hips and upper thighs, not across the belly. Most children will need a booster seat until they have reached 4 feet 9 inches tall and are between 8 and 12 years old.

All children should ride in the rear of a vehicle until they are 13 years old.

For more information on car seat safety, visit www.healthychildren.org/carseatguide.

And don't forget to be a good role model by buckling your seat belt, too!