

Booster Seats: Boost Until Big Enough

Definition: A booster seat lifts a child up so that a vehicle seat belt fits properly. The lap and shoulder belt holds the child and the booster seat in place in case of a crash or sudden stop.

Q: Why do children need to use booster seats?

A: While most parents know about the necessity of car seats for babies, many are not aware of the need to properly restrain older children. Seat belts are designed for people who are at least **4 feet 9 inches** (145cm) tall.

In a crash, a seat belt that fits properly puts pressure evenly across the shoulder, chest, and hip bones – the strongest parts of the body. When a child is too small for a seat belt, it crosses over more vulnerable places, such as the neck and stomach. “Seat belt syndrome” is how doctors describe injuries to the spine and internal organs that can happen to a child who is too small to use a seat belt.

The risk of such injuries is significantly reduced with the use of a booster seat. It raises a child so that the shoulder belt crosses over the shoulder and chest bones, well away from the neck and face. It also keeps the lap belt in place over the hipbones.

Q: What laws are currently in place across Canada?

A: Each province and territory has its own car and booster seat laws. Currently, Nova Scotia (2007), Ontario (2005), and Quebec (2002) have passed legislation requiring the use of booster seats. Booster seat laws will probably be slightly different from one jurisdiction to another, but all laws are working to protect children who have outgrown their car seats and who are too small to be properly protected by a seat belt alone.

NEW REGULATIONS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

**Starting July 1
2008, new
regulations will make
it mandatory for
ALL children:**

- **40 lbs – 80 lbs in weight;**
- **under 4 feet 9 inches in height (145cm); or**
- **9 years old or younger;**

to be secured in a booster seat.

Children who reach the upper weight limit of the booster seat, but who are still under the age of 9 and under 145cm (4 feet 9 inches) in height, will need a booster seat with a higher weight limit.

According to ICBC claims statistics, almost 860 children ages 4-9 are injured or killed in traffic crashes each year in British Columbia (ICBC, 2007)

Using a booster seat provides 60% more protection than seat belt use alone for children ages 4-9 (BCA Traffic Safety Foundation, 2006)

Babies, toddlers, preschoolers are restrained in car seats, and when they outgrow these - often between the ages of 4 and 5 - they should be moved to booster seats

Currently, only 28% of Canadian children ages 4-9 regularly use booster seats. (BCAA Traffic Safety Foundation, 2006)

Q: What types of booster seats are available?

A: Approved booster seats have a **Canadian Motor Vehicle Safety Standards Label**. Every brand of booster seat is a little different, However all new booster seats must be used with a lap and shoulder belt. Read and follow the directions that come with your booster seat.

There are four main types of booster seats with an **average cost of \$75**, but ranging from \$30 to \$200 depending on the model. These models include:

- High Back Booster Seat;
- 2 in 1 Convertible Seat and 3 in 1 Combination Seat (combination harness/booster seat);
- No Back Booster Seat; and
- Shield Booster Seat

Remember:

- Always follow the manufacturer's weight and height limits and instructions for installation.
- Install car and booster seats in the back seat of the vehicle away from front seat air bags.

Q: What booster seat is right for me?

A: The most important thing is to make sure that the booster seat you choose is suitable for your child and for your car (or cars, if you use the child seat in more than one car). Look through the manufacturer's catalogues on their websites or in shops to understand the difference between seat options. Try to find a retailer who will let you (or even better, help you) try the seat in your car before you buy it.

Resources

- Safe Kids Canada. www.safekidscanada.ca
- BCAA Traffic Safety Foundation 2006. <http://www.tsf-bcaa.com/44.aspx>
- Child Safety Link. www.childsafetylink.ca
- Transport Canada, Child Safety Vision. www.tc.gc.ca
- Ontario Ministry of Transportation, Safe and Secure. www.mto.gov.on.ca
- Insurance Corporation of British Columbia 2007, Child Seats. www.icbc.com