



## KEEPING KIDS SAFE IN THE CAR

Car crashes are a leading cause of death and hospital admission for children in Australia. The National Transport Commission estimates that each year there are 28 deaths, 464 serious injuries, and 2,309 minor injuries to child occupants of motor vehicles.

Parents want to do the best for their children but the importance of using the right type of restraint for a child's size and age is not well understood, resulting in many children being prematurely moved to the next type of restraint.

Children up to 12 are more likely to sustain serious injuries, or be needlessly killed in a car crash if they are using the wrong type of restraint for their size and weight. Children who are moved too early from a forward facing child seat with inbuilt harness to a booster seat, or from a booster seat to an adult seatbelt too soon, or who are using the right restraint incorrectly are most at risk.

State and Territory governments are currently preparing to introduce new rules for child passengers. The new rules will require that:

- Babies up to at least 6 months are to use a rear facing restraint with an inbuilt harness
- Children between 6 months and up to at least four years are to use a rearward or forward facing restraint with an inbuilt harness
- Children between 4 and 7 years are to use either a forward facing restraint with inbuilt harness or a booster seat restrained by a correctly adjusted and fastened seatbelt.
- Children under 4 years will not be allowed to occupy the front seat of any vehicle with two or more rows of seats. Children under 7 years will only be allowed to occupy the front seat if all rear seating positions are occupied by younger children.

(NTC Australia: Information Bulletin, Feb 2008)

Whenever there are changes to legislation, there is always some anxiety that people will not be able to comply with the rules. If your child is already in a child restraint appropriate for their age, weight and height, you do not need to change anything.

Some frequently asked questions include:

### **Why do the new rules refer to age instead of weight or height?**

Research has shown that parents and carers know their child's age but not always their weight or height. However this is simply a starting point when considering the correct restraint for your child. Information provided by manufacturers will still refer to height and weight as important determinants for correct restraint use.

### **My child is 3 years old but already too big for the seat with an inbuilt harness, what do I do?**

Children who are over the height or weight limits of the recommended restraint type will be able to use a restraint specified for the next age level.

**My 6 year old has been using the adult seatbelt for almost a year. Will I have to put them back into a booster seat?**

If they are still within the weight and height guidelines for a booster seat, then they will need to use a booster seat until they outgrow it or turn 7 years of age. Kidsafe recommends you leave your child in their current restraint until they outgrow it.

**I have a single cab utility. Can I have my child in this vehicle?**

If the child can be restrained according to the new requirements for their age, yes they can be in a vehicle that has a single row of seats, but bear in mind that it may not be the safest option for your child.

The intent of the proposed changes is to ensure that children are better protected in the event of a car crash. Each State and Territory is expected to implement the new rules in the next three to twelve months. For more information relevant to your State or Territory, contact the relevant State/ Territory Government road safety authority or your local Kidsafe office or visit [www.kidsafe.com.au](http://www.kidsafe.com.au).