CHILD PASSENGER SAFETY

Nature of the Problem
Motor vehicle-related injuries are the leading cause of injury death among Contra Costa children (pie chart). From 1990-1999, 44 Contra Costa children ages 14 and younger were killed and more than 7,263 were injured in motor vehicle crashes. Only 36% were known to be using safety restraints, such as car seats or seat belts, at the time of the collision. Misuse of child seats is widespread. It is estimated that 80% of children who are placed in child safety seats are improperly restrained.

Use of child safety restraints is lower in rural areas and low-income communities. Lack of access to affordable child safety seats contributes to a lower usage rate among low-income families. Restraint use by young children varies by the driver’s use of safety restraints. Only one in four children ages 1-4 years that ride with an unrestrained driver are restrained. Male children ages 1-14 have a fatality rate nearly one and a half times that of female children.

Car seat inspections conducted by Nurses and Cops Caring for Contra Costa Children (NC5) showed that the most common types of errors for car seats were the vehicle belt not securing the seat tightly (48%) and the car seat not snugly fitting the child (42%). Only 8% of rear-facing car seats were installed correctly. When used properly, child safety seats are very effective, reducing the risk of death by 71% for infants up to one year old and by 54% for children ages 1-4 years.

Health Care Costs and Savings
The total annual cost of motor vehicle occupant-related death and injury in the United States is more than $25.5 billion for children age 14 and under. Every dollar spent on a child safety seat saves $32.

Prevention Tips for Parents/Guardians
• ALWAYS buckle up yourself and make sure your children are properly restrained.

Position in the vehicle:
• NEVER place a rear-facing car seat in a front passenger seat that is equipped with an airbag!

• Children aged 12 and younger should ride in the back seat because:
  - The back seat is generally the safest place in a vehicle during a crash, with the risk of injury 30% less for passengers seated in the back.
  - Children sitting in the front seat can be injured and killed by passenger air bags as they inflate in a crash. Air bags can inflate at speeds of up to 200 mph, severely hurting or killing passengers who are smaller or who are too close.
  - Until passenger vehicles are equipped with air bags that are safe and effective for children, those younger than 13 years of age should not ride in a front passenger seat that is equipped with an air bag.
• Try to put car seats in the center back seat. It is farthest from impact from any direction, but not all car seats may fit in this position.

Selecting the Right Car Seat
• Infants should ride in rear-facing child safety seats until they weigh 20 lbs. AND are one year old. Again, never place a rear-facing child safety seat in front of an air bag.

• Toddlers and preschoolers aged 1-4 years should ride in a forward-facing child safety seat until they weigh 40 pounds (usually around age four).

• Children ages 4 to 8 (about 40 to 80 pounds) should be in a car booster seat and restrained with lap/shoulder belt every time they ride.

• Read your child safety seat instruction manual and your motor vehicle owner’s manual for directions on proper installation. All child safety seats should be inspected for correct fit by a certified technician. You should ask the technician for specific information on how to install and use the car seat.

• Try the seat in your vehicle before you buy it, to check if it can be installed or used properly in your vehicle. Many stores will allow this to avoid time-consuming returns.

Prevention Tips for Providers
Education. If you provide services to children and parents, be sure you have information on basic child passenger safety including proper use and installation of car seats and distribute it to parents/caregivers. If you conduct classes or workshops for parents and providers, make sure your staff is trained to adequately address child passenger safety or invite an injury prevention professional to train them. You may also want to become certified as a car seat technician, conduct awareness campaigns and educate parents/caregivers in hospitals, clinics and car dealerships.

Enforcement. Providers can advocate for safer laws in child passenger safety and for the consistent enforcement of those laws. Some examples include advocating for new laws requiring booster seat use for older children or mandating education from car dealerships.

Engineering. Create (or advocate for) better design of cars and car seats that will increase safety, such as a redesign of car passenger air bags, safety belts or car seat harnesses.

Laws and Regulations
California state law (SB 503) requires all hospitals, clinics and birthing centers to have a written policy to provide and discuss information on child passenger restraints before they release children younger than four years old, regardless of weight, or weighing less than 40 pounds, regardless of age. Child care providers are also required to post current child passenger safety laws in their facility as a condition of licensing.
Studies show that child passenger protection and safety belt use laws are effective at increasing restraint use. Ninety percent of Americans favor stronger enforcement laws that require all children to be buckled up. California Vehicle Code 27360 requires mandatory child restraints for children four years old, regardless of weight, or weighing less than 40 pounds, regardless of age. Vehicle Code 27360.5 requires safety belts for older children ages 4-15 who are 40 lbs. or more. Moreover, the law states that the restraint system must be “properly used.”

The new federal Lower Anchors and Tethers for Children, or LATCH, system is designed to standardize and improve child safety seats in order to reduce misuse. LATCH requires most new forward-facing child safety seats to be equipped with tether straps to attach to vehicles. During a three-year phase-in period, ending in 2002, all new vehicles and car seats will be built with lower and topside anchors.

Local Resources
Nurses and Cops Caring for Contra Costa Children (NC5)
Car seat checkups in CCC; NHTSA car seat technician training; other educational programs and information. This project is coordinated by the John Muir Medical Center. (925)941-7989 or khansen@jmmdhhs.com

Easter Seals’ Kids Are Riding Safely (KARS) program
Child passenger safety education; car seat loan program for low income families and families with special car seat needs violators. http://www.esba.org
(925)689-1777 or csmith@esba.org

Childhood Injury Prevention Project
Community Wellness & Prevention Program
General information and resources on child passenger safety; educational materials http://www.ccprevention.org/cipc
(925)313-6813 or cipc411@yahoo.com

Other Resources
The following websites have publications, educational materials, programs and other information available:

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
http://www.nhtsa.gov

Buckle Up Baby
http://www.buckleupbaby.org

National Safe Kids Campaign
http://www.safekids.org

SafetyBeltSafe, U.S.A.
http://www.carseat.org

National Center for Injury Prevention and Control
Centers for Disease Control
http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc

Consumer Product Safety Commission
Information about the safety of many products, including car seats
http://www.cpsc.gov

"'cause injuries are preventable!

**Information provided by the Childhood Injury Prevention Coalition**
For more information contact Nancy Baer 925-313-6837