



Texas State Child Fatality Review Team Committee Position Statement: Motor Vehicle Safety

The State Child Fatality Review Team Committee (SCFRT) works closely with local Child Fatality Review Teams (CFRT) to promote public awareness to reduce the number of preventable child deaths. Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of unintentional injury related deaths for children and adolescents. Child safety seats and seat belts are essential in preventing many deaths and injuries. The statistics are staggering:

- In the United States: There were 1,314 child occupants (birth-14 years) in 2009 that died in motor vehicle crashes and approximately 179,000 were injured.¹ In 2010 nearly 1,700 teens (16-19 years) died as occupants in motor-vehicle crashes and an additional 282,000 were injured.²
- In Texas: Motor vehicle crashes in Texas from 2007-2011 resulted in 982 fatalities of children and teens (birth-17 years). For the same time period, motor vehicle crashes resulted in 1,458 fatalities for teens 16-19 years old.³
- The risk of injury and death is reduced when child safety seats are used versus using seat belts only. The risk of injury can be reduced by as much as 82 percent and deaths can be reduced by 28 percent.⁴
- In addition to the emotional impact, the economic impact of motor-vehicle crash deaths is significant. In the United States, motor vehicle crash deaths generate \$41 billion dollars in medical and work loss costs.⁵ Texas accounts for \$3.5 billion in medical and work loss costs second only to California, and children and teens account for 22 percent of these costs.

The SCFRT is statutorily required to submit annual recommendations to the governor, lieutenant governor, speaker of the House of Representatives and the Department of Family and Protective Services and to share those recommendations with the general public. The recommendations made in the 2011 annual report (http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/mch/Child_Fatality_Review.shtml) that address motor vehicle safety include:

- Legislation to address the risks of distracted driving while using wireless communication devices.
- Legislation to make it an offense if a person operates a motor vehicle on a public highway while having any detectable amount of alcohol in their system while transporting a minor.
- Legislation to repeal Texas Transportation Code, Section 521.205, which allows a parent, step-parent, legal guardian, step-grandparent or grandparent to provide a driver education course to eligible minors.
- Legislation to amend Code of Criminal Procedure, Article 45.0215, to include defendants younger than 18 years of age and their parent, guardian or managing conservator to appear in court on hearings of moving violations.

The SCFRT supports child passenger safety laws that require age-appropriate restraints for all Texas children. The SCFRT joins other leaders in injury prevention such as the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS), the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), Safe Kids Worldwide and the Texas

¹ Department of Transportation (US), National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Traffic Safety Facts 2008: Children. Washington (DC): 2009.

² CDC Teen Driver Fact Sheet: www.cdc.gov/Motorvehiclesafety/Teen_Drivers/teendrivers_factsheet.html.

³ Texas Department of Transportation. Crash Records Information System. November 2012.

⁴ American Academy of Pediatrics. Committee on Injury, Violence and Poison Prevention. Child Passenger Safety. *Pediatrics*. 2011;127(4) 788-793.

⁵ Costs of deaths in motor vehicle crashes. CDC Cost and Prevention Policies: www.cdc.gov/Motorvehiclesafety/statecosts/tx.html, 2011.

Department of State Health Services (DSHS) in recommending that children use a child passenger safety system until the child reaches a height of four feet and nine inches and they can fit safely into an lap and shoulder seat belt system.

The practice of using child safety seats and booster seats has been shown to save lives and reduce injury and therefore can significantly reduce Texas health care expenditures. It is estimated that a \$46 child safety seat and a \$31 booster seat respectively generate on average \$1,900 and \$2,200 in benefits to society.^{6,7} Using these estimated figures with the population for Texas children birth to 8 years old, the estimated benefits would exceed \$7 billion.

Texas law now requires both adults and children to be buckled up in the front or back seat. A child younger than 8 years old, unless taller than 4 feet 9 inches, must ride in a child safety seat.⁸ Most children between 4 and 8 years old will need a booster seat to be safe and comply with the law. Fines range from \$25 to \$250, plus court costs. For more information visit: www.TexasClickitorTicket.com.

Even though there is evidence supporting the use of child safety seats, booster seats and seat belts to reduce death and injury, these safety mechanisms are often not used or used incorrectly. In one report, 40 percent of children riding in a motor vehicle with an unrestrained driver were themselves unrestrained.⁹ Another study showed that child safety and booster seats were used in a way that would increase the risk of injury in a motor vehicle crash.¹⁰

In a 2012 study conducted by the Texas Transportation Institute, there was a high degree of correlation between safety belt use for drivers and properly restrained child passengers¹¹. Drivers wearing safety belts transported properly restrained child passengers (ages 5-16) 69.3 percent of the time and unrestrained drivers were transporting unrestrained child passengers (ages 5-16) 80.3 percent of the time. Texas continues to receive federal funding to implement safety belt and child passenger safety programs, including the successful Click It or Ticket campaign. Before the campaign was implemented in 2002, only 76 percent of the state's population was using safety belts. With enhanced enforcement and an extensive public education campaign, in 2012 Texas drivers and front seat passengers have increased safety belt use to 94.04 percent.¹²

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that this increase in safety belt use in Texas over the past 11 years has resulted in 3,663 fewer traffic fatalities, over 50,000 fewer serious injuries, and a savings to the state of more than \$10 billion.¹³

In addition to supporting age-appropriate child passenger safety laws, the SCFRT recommends the following best practices guidelines regarding the principles of motor vehicle passenger safety.

Recommendations by the AAP for Child Passenger Safety¹⁴:

- Rear facing child safety seats for most infants up to 2 years of age
- Forward-facing child safety seats for most children through 4 years of age
- Belt-positioning booster seats for most children through 8 years of age
- Lap-and-shoulder seat belts for all who have outgrown booster seats

⁶Children's Safety Network Economics & Data Analysis Resource Center. Injury Prevention: What Works? Cost analysis of injury prevention programs (fact sheets). Last updated June 9, 2005. Pacific Institute for Research & Evaluation (PIRE) 11710 Beltsville Drive, Suite 300 Calverton, MD 20705-3102.

⁷ Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation. Injury Prevention: What Works? A summary of Cost-Outcome Analysis for Injury Prevention Programs Facts Sheets 2005.

⁸ Transportation Code Chapter 545 Operation and Movement of Vehicles, Subchapter A, Section 412, 4121, 413

⁹ Cody BE, Mickalide AD, Paul HP, Colella JM. Child passengers at risk in America: a national study of restraint use. Washington (DC): National SAFE KIDS Campaign; 2002.

¹⁰ Department of Transportation (US), National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Traffic Safety Facts Research Note 2005: Misuse of Child Restraints: Results of a Workshop to Review Field Data Results, Washington (DC): 2006.

¹¹ Texas Transportation Institute, Observational Study of Safety Belt Use of School Aged Children in Texas, August 2012.

¹² Texas Transportation Institute, Statewide Observational Survey of Safety Belt and Motorcycle Helmet Use in Texas, August 2012.

¹³ Department of Transportation (US), National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, August 2012 data analysis for Texas.

¹⁴ American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Injury, Violence and Poison Prevention, Child Passenger Safety. *Pediatrics* 2011;127(4) 788-793.

- All children younger than 13 years to ride in the rear seats of vehicles

The AAP also makes the following recommendations for motor vehicle passenger safety:¹⁵

- Best child safety seat: The one that is the best fit for child's size, is correctly installed, fits well in vehicle and is used properly every time.
- Avoid using child safety seats that are used, have an unknown history of use, are damaged or have missing parts.
- Avoid using child safety seats that are recalled.
- Do not use child safety seats that have been involved in moderate or severe crashes.
- Air bags can be dangerous to children. If a vehicle has a front passenger air bag then:
 - Infants in rear-facing child safety seats must be restrained in the rear seat of the vehicle.
 - Vehicles with no back seat are not a good choice for transporting young children.
 - Caregivers should read the vehicle owner's manual regarding safety restraints and airbags.
- Premature and small infants should not be placed in child safety seats with shields, abdominal pads, or armrests that could directly impact an infant's face or neck during a motor-vehicle crash.
- Children with special health care needs should have access to appropriate restraint systems.^{16,17}
- Adults and teens should be role models for young children by always wearing a safety belt.
- Never leave a child alone in and around motor vehicles in order to avoid:
 - Heat stroke while trapped in a motor vehicle
 - Suffocation by power windows, seat belts, sunroofs and trapped in a trunk
 - Being struck by a moving vehicle

The following information is provided as a resource for installation of car safety seats, product recalls and to seek assistance from a certified Child Passenger Safety (CPS) technician:

- NHTSA: 888-327-4236 or www.nhtsa.gov/cps/cpsfitting/index.cfm?
- SeatCheck: 866-732-8243 or www.seatcheck.org
- National Child Passenger Safety Technicians: 877-366-154 or <http://cert.safekids.org>
- Safe Riders Traffic Safety Program: 800-252-8255 or www.dshs.state.tx.us/saferiders
- Recalls: www.safecar.gov

The Safe Riders program, sponsored by DSHS in cooperation with TxDOT, provides helpful information about child passenger safety including:

- Child safety seat education and distribution programs for low-income families
- CPS technician training courses
- Child safety seat checkups and inspection stations
- Traffic safety presentations and community awareness workshops
- Free traffic safety educational materials
- Texans Saved by the Belt recognition

The SCFRT also supports Texas law prohibiting children and adolescents from riding in the cargo area of pickup trucks¹⁸. The AAP recommends prohibiting any passenger to ride in the cargo area of pickup trucks.¹⁹ Compared with restrained occupants in the cab of pickup trucks, the risk of death for those in the cargo area is eight times higher.²⁰ In Texas, from 2007-2011, there were 236 children ages birth-17 years seriously injured while riding in the cargo area of pickup trucks.²¹

¹⁵ Car Safety Seats: A Guide for Families. American Academy of Pediatrics 2012.

¹⁶ American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Injury and Poison Prevention. Transporting Children with Special Health Care Needs. *Pediatrics* 104(4); 988-992, October 1999.

¹⁷ Transporting Children with Special Needs, AAP Parenting Corner Q&A, http://www2.aap.org/publiced/BR_SpNeedsCarSeats.htm

¹⁸ Transportation Code Chapter 545 Operation and Movement of Vehicles, Subchapter A, Section 414

¹⁹ American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Injury and Poison Prevention, Children in Pickup Trucks. *Pediatrics* 106(4): 857-859, October 2000.

²⁰ Anderson A, Agran P, Winn D. Fatalities of occupants in cargo areas of pickup trucks. *Accid Anal Prev.* 2000;32:533-540.

²¹ Texas Department of Transportation. Crash Records Information System. November 2012.

Parents can have a major impact on keeping teens safe from injury and alive by being role models and avoiding risks that lead to injuries and fatalities. The CDC reports that that young teens and adult drivers are the age group at highest risk for crashes and account for one-third of all the costs, \$26 billion, for motor vehicle injuries.²² The following are recommendations for parents, guardians and caregivers:

- Be a role model. Driver education may be the most convenient way to learn driving skills, but it does not produce safer drivers. Take an active role in helping your teen be safe in motor vehicles:²³
 - Wear safety belts at all times while driving and as a passenger.
 - Do not drink and drive or have alcohol or drugs in the car.
 - Do not allow drivers to be distracted.
 - Do not speed.
 - Obey all traffic laws.
- Evidence shows that parent-taught driver education (PTDE) is ineffective and poses a risk to the young, inexperienced driver.²⁴ Professional driver education (in schools or through driving schools) coupled with parental support of teen drivers are recommended.
- Become familiar with the Graduated Driver License (GDL) laws and restrictions on young drivers. The GDL program in Texas was implemented in 2002 and provides young drivers with a system to gradually improve their driving skills over time and have teens learn to drive in low risk environments before being granted a non-provisional driver's license. In Texas, teen drivers 15-17 years of age have a provisional license. For more information on GDL, visit the Texas DPS website: www.txdps.state.tx.us/administration/driver_licensing_control/graduateddriver.htm

The SCFRT Position Statement on Motor Vehicle Safety is a product of the SCFRT Workgroup on Motor Vehicle Safety (Dr. Juan Parra, Terry Pence, Captain Steven Tellez and Chief Joe Hamilton). The Position Statement on Motor Vehicle Safety will be reviewed and updated as new validated information indicates.

November 2008, October 2009, December 2012

²² CDC Teen Driver Fact Sheet: www.cdc.gov/Motorehiclesafety/Teen_Drivers/teendrivers_factsheet.html

²³ American Academy of Pediatrics, A message to parents of Teen Drivers. Healthy Children: Teen Safety, 2011.

²⁴ V,J, Pezoldt, K.N. Womack, and D.E. Morris. Parent-Taught Driver Education in Texas: A Comparative Evaluation, Texas Transportation Institute, the Texas A&M University System, College Station, TX. <http://opi.mt.gov/pdf/DriverEd/RR/NHTSA.pdf>