

# California Laws – Keep Your Child Safe in the Car



More than 1,000 children are killed in motor vehicle crashes in the U.S. every year. To prevent these tragedies, select a car seat based on your child's size, then choose a seat that fits your vehicle, and use it every time.

## California Law

BIRTH TO 16 YEARS

**Children under 2 years old must be rear facing in a car seat** unless they weigh 40 pounds or more, or are 40 inches tall or more.

**Children under age 8** must be properly buckled into a car seat or a booster in the back seat.

**Children age 8 or older**, or who are 4'9" or taller, may use the vehicle seat belt if it fits properly with the lap belt low on the hips, touching the upper thighs, and the shoulder belt crossing the center of the chest. If children are not tall enough for proper belt fit, they must ride in a booster or car seat.

**Exemptions:** A child under age 8 may ride in an appropriate restraint system in the front seat if:

- There is no rear seat.
- The rear seats are side-facing jump seats.
- The rear seats are rear-facing seats.
- The car seat or booster cannot be installed properly in the rear seat.
- All rear seats are already occupied by children seven years of age or under.
- Medical reasons require that a child cannot ride in the rear seat. Proof of the child's medical condition may be required.
- However, a child cannot be transported in a rear-facing car seat in the front seat that is equipped with an active frontal passenger airbag.

## Protect your child – It is the Law!

**FINES & PENALTIES**

In California, for each child under 16 who is not properly buckled, parents (if in the car) or drivers can be fined more than **\$500** and get a point on their driving records.

## Rear-Facing Car Seats

Children under the age of 2 are required to ride in a **REAR-FACING** car seat in the back seat; as recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics. Car seat manufacturers recommend that children remain in a rear-facing car seat until they reach the top height or weight limit allowed. Rear-facing is the safest way to ride. Once your child outgrows the rear-facing car seat, your child is ready to travel in a forward-facing car seat with a harness and tether.



**CAR SEAT INSTALLATION TIPS** – Once a child is placed in the car seat, be sure that the harness straps are snug and can not be pinched between your thumb and forefinger, that the chest clip is at armpit level, and that the car seat is tightly secured and does not move more than an inch from side to side. For rear-facing car seats, the harness straps are even with or below the shoulder and when the car seat is forward facing, the harness straps are even with or above the shoulders.



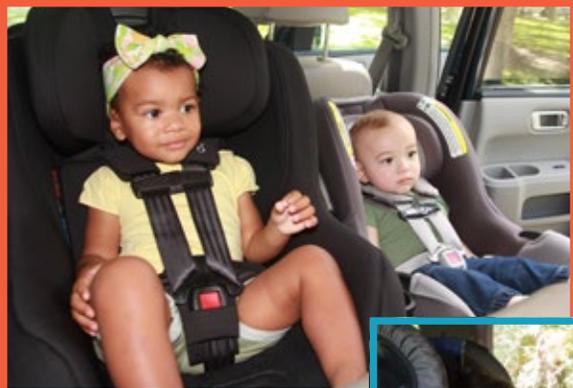
## Forward-Facing Car Seats

Keep your child in a **FORWARD-FACING** car seat with a harness until your child reaches the top

height or weight limit allowed by the car seat manufacturer. Forward-facing seats must be used with a top tether strap.

A car seat converts from a 5-point harness into a booster seat when your child is ready. Once your child outgrows the forward-facing car seat with a harness, it is time to travel in a **BOOSTER SEAT**, and still in the back seat.

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## Boosters & Beyond

**BOOSTER SEATS** elevate your child so that the shoulder strap fits comfortably across the chest, the lap belt stays low over the hips, and the knees bend over the seat edge. Keep your children in a **BOOSTER SEAT** until they are big enough to fit in a seat belt properly.



Older kids are ready to move out of their booster seat *only* when they pass the **5 STEP TEST**.

## 5 Step Test

If you answer “no” to any of these questions, then the child needs to continue to ride in a booster seat.

1. Is the child sitting tall so his/her whole back is touching the seatback?
2. Do the child's knees bend comfortably at the edge of the seat?
3. Does the belt cross the shoulder between the neck and arm?
4. Is the lap belt touching the tops of the legs?
5. Can the child sit like this for the whole trip?



All children are safest, properly restrained and in **the back seat until age 13**.

**NEVER** place the shoulder belt under the arm or behind the back.

## Car Seat Questions

To find an inspection station near you, go to [www.nhtsa.gov/equipment/car-seats-and-boosters#installation-help-inspection](http://www.nhtsa.gov/equipment/car-seats-and-boosters#installation-help-inspection).



California law **PROHIBITS** smoking and electronic use of tobacco and marijuana in a motor vehicle when a minor (17 years old and under) is present. A violation is punishable by a fine of up to \$100.

## Dangers In & Around Cars & Kaitlyn's Law

**It is against California law** to leave a child who is 6 years of age or younger alone in the car without the supervision of a person at least 12 years old if:

1. The keys are in the ignition or the car is running, or
2. There is a significant risk to the child.

**Children are most at risk of being injured** when vehicles are moving forward or backing out of a driveway. Know the blind zones of your vehicle.

**Look Before You Lock** to be sure you have not left a child in the back seat. **HEATSTROKE** as a result of a child being left in a vehicle is a terrible tragedy.

*Funding for this publication was provided by the California Department of Public Health (and photo courtesy) and a grant from the California Office of Traffic Safety, through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).*

