

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT BOOSTER SEATS AND OHIO'S NEW BOOSTER SEAT LAW

What's new about Ohio's Child Passenger Safety Law?

Ohio's Child Passenger Safety (CPS) law was expanded in January 2009 to require children who are younger than 8 years to be properly restrained in a booster seat or child safety seat that meets federal motor vehicle safety standards, unless the child is 4 feet 9 inches or taller. Previously, Ohio's law covered children only up to age 4 years and 40 pounds.

What is Ohio's new Booster Seat Law?

Children who are:

1. less than 8 years of age, *and*
2. less than 4 feet 9 inches in height, who are not required to be secured in a child safety seat, must be properly restrained by the operator of the vehicle in a booster seat that meets federal motor vehicle safety standards.

When does the new law go into effect?

The booster seat part of Ohio's child restraint law went into effect **Oct. 7, 2009**. Following this date, there will be a six-month warning period in which law enforcement will issue only warnings in an attempt to educate parents/caregivers about the new law. Full enforcement of the law, including issuing citations, will begin April 7, 2010.

How do booster seats work?

Booster seats work by raising a child up so the vehicle seat belt fits properly:

- The shoulder strap lies across the middle of the chest and shoulder, not across the neck.
- The lap belt sits low over the upper thighs and hips, not over the belly.

This seat belt position is very important in a crash so the strongest places on the child's body, and not the internal organs, absorb the forces of the crash. Proper positioning can prevent serious injuries.

What is the difference between a child safety seat and a booster seat?

Booster seats are different than child safety seats.

- A child safety seat uses an internal harness to secure your child in the safety seat. Then, either the seat belt or the LATCH system (lower anchors and tether) is used to secure the safety seat to the vehicle seat.
- With booster seats, the child uses the vehicle's seat belt. The booster seat does not restrain the child; the seat belt does. The booster seat simply raises the child up to the proper height so the seat belt fits them properly.

Some seats are now available that are "combination" child restraint/booster seat models. **It is very important to read the manufacturer's instructions for your seat.** With these seats, you will use the seat's internal harness restraint system until the child reaches the upper weight limit/size for the harness. (Most child restraint systems are approved for use with harness straps up to 40 pounds.) When the internal harness is removed, the seat becomes a booster seat and the vehicle seat belt is used to secure your child. Information on selected child restraint weight limits can be found at: <http://www.aap.org/family/Carseatguide.htm>, but always use the manufacturer's instructions that came with your seat if there are any differences.

Do booster seats prevent injury?

Yes, research studies have shown booster seats reduce a child's risk of injury in a crash by 59 percent. (Source: *Partners for Child Passenger Safety project, Children's Hospital of Philadelphia*)

How long does my child need to stay in a safety seat?

According to Ohio law, every child under 8 years old must ride in a booster seat or other appropriate child safety seat (including infant seats, convertible seats, forward-facing seats, booster seats, or other federally approved safety devices) unless the child is 4 feet 9 inches or taller. However, nationally recognized best practice recommendations are for most children to ride in booster seats until they are big enough for lap/shoulder belts to fit properly. Additional information on proper fitting can be found at:

<http://www.carseat.org/>

Does my child have to be 4 feet, 9 inches tall if he/she is already 8 years old to move from a booster seat to just the seat belt?

According to Ohio's law, if your child is 8 years old, then he/she is not legally required to be in a booster seat. However, nationally recognized best practice recommendations are for most children to ride in booster seats until they are big enough for lap/shoulder belts to fit properly (see next question). The safety of your child is related more to the proper fit of the seat belt than to your child's age. Seat belt fit varies from person to person and car to car. Additional information on proper fitting can be found at: <http://www.carseat.org/>

When should my child move from a booster seat to a seat belt?

A booster seat is designed to place a child higher on the vehicle seat so that the lap/shoulder belt fits correctly. Seat belt fit varies from car to car and from person to person. It is safest for your child to remain in a booster seat until the adult seat belt system fits his/her properly as follows:

- ✓ Your child is tall enough to sit against the vehicle seat back with his/her knees bent at the edge of the seat without slouching.
- ✓ The shoulder belt lies in the middle of his/her chest and shoulder, not his/her neck or throat.
- ✓ The lap belt is low and snug across the upper thighs, not the belly.
- ✓ Your child can stay in this position comfortably throughout the entire trip.

Additional information on proper fitting can be found at: <http://www.carseat.org/>

My booster seat can be used to 80 pounds, but my 48-pound child complains that the straps are too tight. Do I need to buy a different seat?

Most child restraint systems are approved for use with harness straps to 40 pounds. Your seat may be a "combination" child restraint/booster seat, in which case you should remove the harness straps and use the seat as a "belt-positioning booster seat" with your car's lap and shoulder belt. Read the instructions for your child's car seat and your vehicle manual to make sure you are using the car seat/booster seat as described by the manufacturers.

Nothing holds the booster seat into my car and there are no straps for my child. How can that be safe?

Belt-positioning booster seats, designed for children over 40 pounds who have outgrown child safety seats with harnesses, are positioning devices that help children fit into the car's lap and shoulder belt. Booster seats do not restrain the child; the seat belt does. For stability, a few belt-positioning booster seats currently on the market can be installed in LATCH-equipped vehicles with lower anchorages. Read and follow the booster seat instruction manual.

My car has only lap belts in the back seat, and I was told I cannot use them with my booster seat. What can I do?

- In this situation, the safest solution is to find a child safety seat and other restraint system that has an internal harness with a higher weight limit. A list of these seats can be found at: <http://www.aap.org/family/Carseatguide.htm>. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions that come with your seat if these limits differ.
- Contact a car seat technician in your area for additional suggestions. Call 1-800-755-GROW (4769) or 1-866-CAR-SEAT for a contact near you.
- A *last resort* is to restrain your child with just the lap belt (without a booster).

Where can I get a booster seat?

Booster seats can be purchased in retail stores and on the Internet.

Are there programs giving out free booster seats?

At this time, there are no large-scale programs where parents can get free booster seats. Fortunately booster seats are generally less expensive than child safety seats. Some boosters can be purchased for as little as \$15-\$20.

There are several programs throughout the state providing child restraints and booster seats for families who can not afford them:

- The Ohio Department of Health has a program that gives a limited number of seats to each county so they can be provided to eligible, low-income families. Call 1-800-755-GROW (4769) for information about your county's program.
- Safe Kids Coalitions throughout Ohio may also have low-cost or limited free seats available. For a list of Safe Kids Coalitions in Ohio, visit http://www.usa.safekids.org/state_display.cfm

Where can I get a copy of the law?

Ohio's CPS law can be defined in Ohio Revised Code 4511.81 <http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/4511.81>

Where can I get additional information about booster seats?

Following are a few Web sites with information on booster seats. This is just a partial list:

Boost Ohio Kids Coalition Web site

<http://www.boostohiokids.org>

Partners for Child Passenger Safety Program, Children's Hospital of Philadelphia

General Booster Seat Information

<http://stokes.chop.edu/programs/carseat/4to8.php>

Belt Positioning Booster Seat Factsheet

http://stokes.chop.edu/programs/injury/files/Fact_Sheets/educational/FYF_boosters.pdf

Center for Injury Research and Policy, Nationwide Children's Hospital – Safety Boost Tool

<http://sharedoc.nchri.org/CIRP/Safety%20Boost/Safety%20Boost%20Tool.pdf>