

KIDS AND AIRBAGS



Airbags are a success. They've inflated in millions of crashes, **saved thousands of lives**, and prevented many more serious injuries. But like some medications and other public health successes, airbags have caused unintended adverse effects. Nearly all of these are minor injuries like bruises and abrasions that are more than offset by the lives airbags have saved.

But some airbag injuries have been serious. There have been some deaths. These have occurred when someone has been **on top of, or very close to, an airbag** as it began inflating. Infants in rear-facing restraints and unbelted or unrestrained children in the front seats of vehicles with passenger airbags are at the most risk.

You can **eliminate this risk**, and you can almost always do it without going to the trouble of getting permission from the federal government for an on/off switch for your passenger airbag. Begin by putting your child in a back seat and using a restraint appropriate to the child's size, as **required in all 50 states**.

**YOU CAN ELIMINATE
THE RISK OF INFLATION INJURY
FROM FRONTAL AIRBAGS
BY RESTRAINING CHILDREN
IN A BACK SEAT.**





DON'T DO THIS

IF THERE'S A PASSENGER AIRBAG



Starting with a baby's first trip, put the newborn in the safest place

— a rear-facing restraint in a back seat. Make sure it's tightly secured according to directions provided by the manufacturers of both the restraint and the vehicle. At first when a baby can't support its head, you may need to put rolled towels or foam inserts around the head.

Remember it's safer in the back seat compared with the front, even without passenger airbags, so the back seat is always preferred. Many parents want to **put their new babies in front**, where they're easier to see. This may be tempting, but don't do it. It isn't the safest place for a child to ride.

Don't put a baby in a rear-facing restraint in the front seat if there's a passenger airbag, and don't turn the restraint around. **Infants shouldn't ride in front** unless there's no alternative, as in a two-seat vehicle — and even then only if the passenger airbag is labeled “advanced” (meaning it will deploy with low force or deactivate if a child is in the passenger seat) or if the airbag has been turned off manually.

If there's an on/off switch for your passenger airbag, you do have to **remember to switch off the bag** if an infant is riding in front and check the airbag's status every trip. And remember the back is always safer.



**Infants grow very quickly,
and the restraints toddlers use**

differ from those for infants. Rear-facing restraints are for babies up to at least one year old. When they outgrow these restraints, infants should graduate to child seats that face forward. **They provide excellent protection** when used properly and, like infant restraints, should be used in a back seat, not the front.

Be sure to **secure your child in a restraint** according to instructions. In newer vehicles, both rear- and forward-facing restraints should be easier to install because their attachments are required to mate with anchors in cars. Use safety belts to anchor child restraints in older cars. Either way **don't expect installation to be a breeze** so be sure to check the fit of a restraint in the vehicle in which you plan to use it before purchasing it. Some vehicles have built-in child restraints, making them easy to use correctly. Whatever type of restraint you use, remember the most important step, which is to **buckle your child into it.**

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... A CHILD CAN USE AN ADULT BELT



Soon toddlers become big kids who outgrow their child restraints

and can use the adult lap/shoulder belts provided in vehicles. A child may need a special booster seat at first. These do just what the name implies. They boost smaller children higher so they fit better and more comfortably into adult safety belts.

Once children graduate to adult belts, remember proper use. **Don't put a safety belt's shoulder portion** behind a child or under the arm. Don't let a child do this, either, because it compromises protection. If necessary, get a booster seat to help fit the shoulder belt comfortably across the child.

The **lap belt is equally important**. Position it low and make sure it goes across a child's hips. **Don't let it rise up** over the child's abdomen where the belt itself could become a hazard.

Make sure older children, just like infants, ride restrained in a back seat. Only if there are too many children for all of them to ride in back should one of them be allowed up front with a passenger airbag. Then it's essential to **adjust the seat** so it's as far back as possible and, again, make sure the child is secured in a properly fitting lap/shoulder belt. A child riding in front also should sit back in the seat, not perched on the edge or leaning forward to, for example, fiddle with radio dials.



BEST PLACE FOR TODDLERS IS IN BACK



Airbags don't have to pose a risk for kids, provided they're not

positioned too close to an airbag — or positioned so they could get too close. Pay attention to this hazard because it's serious, and then take the right steps to eliminate it:

1. Proper restraint use comes first. Riding unrestrained or improperly restrained in a motor vehicle always has been **the greatest hazard** for children.

2. The safest place for kids to ride is in back. This was true before airbags, and now it's **doubly true**. Infants and children riding in back seats cannot be in the paths of inflating airbags.

3. **Never use a rear-facing restraint in the front seat** with a passenger airbag. The exception is in a two-seat car with an airbag labeled “advanced” or switched off.

4. When it comes to buckling up, what's good for kids is **good for adults, too**. So use your own lap/shoulder belt. Belts provide important protection in crashes. Plus they keep people in the best position to be protected by their airbags. Another reason to use your safety belt is to **set a good example** for your children.

Airbags plus lap/shoulder belts are the best protection for most people, but this system is designed primarily for adults. Younger people need special restraints, and following the **simple precautions** outlined here can ensure optimum protection for everybody.



Get an on/off switch for your passenger airbag? The most likely answer is no.

Before you consider getting an on/off switch for a passenger airbag, remember the best way to eliminate injury risk among children is to ensure they ride in back. The back seat is safer anyway. Circumstances in which an on/off switch might be needed were rare to begin with. Now they're disappearing as the airbags in newer cars are designed to pose less risk.

The federal government has established procedures and criteria for permitting people to get airbag on/off switches. These are needed in only a few cases when airbags may present an injury risk.

What are the few cases? For example, when an infant with medical problems requires observation and the driver is the only other person in the car. Then a baby would need to ride in front, and a passenger airbag could present a risk. Of course, paying attention to a baby is distracting and involves its own risks.

Another example is parents who often transport too many small kids to put them all in back. Even in this case, an on/off switch isn't necessarily the best option. An older child may ride up front if the seat is all the way back and the child is securely buckled in a lap/shoulder belt and sitting back in the seat. Leaning forward to, for example, fiddle with radio dials can put a child at risk from an inflating airbag. Only if there's concern about keeping a child sitting back would a parent need to consider getting an on/off switch for the airbag.

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