



Always wear a seatbelt

SEAT BELTS AND child restraints



wearing a seat belt

SAVES LIVES

FOR YOUR OWN AND OTHERS' SAFETY, THE LAW REQUIRES YOU TO USE A SEAT BELT IF ONE IS FITTED AND FOR CHILDREN UP TO 135CMS IN HEIGHT TO USE A CHILD RESTRAINT

Seat belt wearing saves over 2,000 lives every year. Everyone knows they should wear a seat belt in the front seat, but many people still don't realise how dangerous it is not to wear a seat belt in the back.

IN A CRASH AT 30MPH, IF YOU ARE UNRESTRAINED, YOU WILL HIT THE FRONT SEAT, AND ANYONE IN IT, WITH A FORCE OF BETWEEN 30 AND 60 TIMES YOUR OWN BODY WEIGHT.

This could result in death or serious injury to you and people sitting in the front seat.

Any compensation for injury following an accident may be reduced if you were not wearing a seat belt.



the law

In law:

- > You must wear a seat belt in cars and goods vehicles where one is fitted. There are very few exceptions to this. The driver is liable to prosecution if a child under 14 years does not wear a seat belt or child restraint.
- > You must not carry an unrestrained child in the front seat of any vehicle.
- > Children up to 135cms in height must use the appropriate child restraint when travelling in any car, van or goods vehicle - there are very few exceptions.
- > A child may use an adult belt when they reach 135cm in height or the age of 12 (whichever is reached first).
- > In minibuses with seat belts fitted passengers 3 years and over must use seat belts or child restraints if available.
- > In buses and coaches with seat belts fitted, passengers aged 14 years and above must use them. Regulations will be brought in as soon as possible to require children 3 to 13 years to use seat belts (or child restraints) in these vehicles. Passengers in public fare-paying buses used wholly on 30mph roads are exempt.

The law in respect of cars, vans and goods vehicles is summarised in the table below.

	FRONT SEAT	REAR SEAT	WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?
Driver	Seat belt must be worn if fitted		Driver
Child under 3 years of age	Correct child restraint must be used	Correct child restraint must be used. If one is not available in a licensed taxi/private hire vehicle, may travel unrestrained	Driver
Child from 3rd birthday up to 135cms in height (approx 4ft 5ins) (or 12th birthday, whichever they reach first)	Correct child restraint must be used	Correct child restraint must be used where seat belts fitted. Must use adult belt in rear seat if correct child restraint not available: – in a licensed taxi/private hire vehicle; – for a short distance in an unexpected necessity; – if two occupied child restraints prevent fitting of a third; – a child 3 years and over may travel unrestrained in the rear seat of a vehicle if seat belts are not fitted in the rear	Driver
Child 12 or 13, or over 135cms (approx 4ft 5ins) in height	Adult seat belt must be worn if available	Adult seat belt must be worn if available	Driver
Adult passengers	Seat belt must be worn if available	Seat belt must be worn if available	Passenger

which vehicles does the

LAW AFFECT?

All vehicles where seat belts are fitted, including vans and other goods vehicles, buses, minibuses and coaches.



what if there are

NOT ENOUGH SEAT BELTS AVAILABLE?

Seat belt wearing law does not currently prevent you from carrying more adult passengers than there are seat belts available, but the law will change in 2009. This means that in vehicles where seat belts are fitted the number of passengers must not exceed the number of seats available fitted with seat belts. Children up to 135cms in height must have child restraints with few exceptions. It is an offence if the way in which passengers are carried causes danger to any person in the vehicle. Do not overload a vehicle. If you have adult passengers without a seat belt remember that they can cause injury to others in an accident.

Children 3 years and over can only travel in the back of a vehicle without seat belts (e.g. a classic car) and those under 3 years cannot be carried at all.

seat belt

USE

Lap-and-diagonal belts provide more protection and should be used before lap-only belts.

Adjust the seat belt so that the lap belt is as low as possible across the hip bones – not over the stomach. Make sure the diagonal strap lies across the chest and away from the neck. It should slope up and back to the top fixing point and not be twisted. In many cars, you can adjust the height of the top fixing point to make this easier. Do not leave any slack in the belt.

Do not try to improve seat belt comfort with padding or cushions or sit on any mats or cushions. If you find your seat belt is really uncomfortable, ask the vehicle manufacturer if they have a recommended comfort device.

The centre rear seats of many cars are fitted with a lap-only seat belt that must be adjusted manually. It is important that you adjust such belts for a snug fit over your hips, without any slack.

NEVER PUT THE SAME SEAT BELT AROUND TWO CHILDREN, OR AROUND YOURSELF AND ANOTHER PASSENGER (ADULT OR CHILD).

DO NOT ALLOW YOUR CHILD TO USE THE ADULT BELT TOO EARLY (SEE PAGES 7 AND 10).



pregnant WOMEN

THE LAP STRAP SHOULD GO ACROSS THE HIPS, FITTING COMFORTABLY UNDER THE BUMP, WHILE THE DIAGONAL STRAP SHOULD BE PLACED BETWEEN THE BREASTS AND AROUND THE BUMP.

Like any other driver or passenger, pregnant women must wear a seat belt. There is no automatic exemption for them. Wearing a belt may not be comfortable, but it improves safety for both mother and unborn baby.

airbags

- Airbag systems differ from car to car, therefore always check and follow specific advice from the manufacturer or in the owner's hand book. This is particularly important in relation to children and frontal airbags.
- Studies show that airbags reduce severe head injuries in accidents. **However airbags are not substitutes for seat belts – they are designed to work with them.** Given the speed and force with which an airbag inflates, it is vitally important that you always wear your seat belt and that you do not sit too close to the steering wheel or dashboard. We recommend that the distance between the centre of the steering wheel to your breastbone should be at least 10 inches (25cms).
- The law prohibits the use of a rear facing baby seat against an active frontal airbag.

disabled PERSON'S BELTS

Disabled drivers or passengers (adult or children) may need to use specially adapted belts known as 'disabled person's belts'. Their design may differ from the standard lap or 3-point seat belt and they are intended for use solely by disabled people. Similarly, disabled children may need to use child restraints specially designed for their requirements. The regulations allow disabled person's belts or child restraints to be used instead of the standard seat belts and child restraints.

child RESTRAINT SYSTEMS

TAKE TIME TO MAKE SURE YOUR CHILD RESTRAINTS ARE PROPERLY FITTED EVERY TIME.

Injuries to children can be significantly reduced by using a suitable child restraint. They must be approved to the United Nations ECE Regulation 44.03 (or later e.g. 44.04) type approved standards. These give the weight range for the children who may use them. You must use the right one for each child. There are several types of child restraints – baby seats, child seats, booster seats and booster cushions. You must check on the seat description itself that it is suitable for your child's weight. Look for a label with an "E" mark and an approval number starting with '03' or 44.03 (or later numbering,

e.g. .04) and the weight range of child for which it is designed. Only very old restraints will have a BS "Kitemark".



REAR-FACING BABY SEATS PROVIDE VERY HIGH LEVELS OF PROTECTION FOR YOUNG BABIES, BUT BY LAW THEY MUST NOT BE USED WHERE A FRONT SEAT IS PROTECTED BY AN ACTIVE FRONTAL AIRBAG.

Before buying a child restraint, you should try it in your car to make sure it fits properly. Ask for a demonstration. A properly installed restraint fits tightly into the adult seat – push your weight against it while tightening the adult seat belt. The seat belt buckle should not rest on the restraint frame. **Beware** of old or second-hand restraints which may be damaged or worn out. They may not have proper fitting instructions and may not meet current standards.

Take ample time to fit a child restraint in your car and always follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully. Recent vehicles may have ISOFix attachment points. An ISOFix child restraint is installed using these and not the

adult seat belt (although many can be used with adult belts). They are easier and quicker to install accurately and safely. But always check whether a child restraint is suitable for the ISOFix points in your car – some will differ.

Adult belts are best for adults over 150cms (4ft 11ins) or taller - the law allows children to use adult belts from 135cms in height. The law requires that children under 135cms must use the correct child seat or booster. A booster seat or cushion may not be popular with older children but it puts them in the right position so that they get the maximum protection from the adult belt. It is important to get the belt low across the abdomen from hip bone to hip bone and over the shoulder, away from the neck.

As children get older, they need to move up to the next restraint. The table summarises which child restraint type is suitable for a range of child weights. However for specific information you should refer to the manufacturer's instructions for the suitability of the restraint for your child. **Manufacturers may use different names and some products cover more than one weight range.**

UNECE 44.03 GROUP	WEIGHT RANGE	AGE RANGE (APPROX)
Group 0 and 0+ (eg baby seat)	Up to 13kgs	Birth to 9-12 months
Group 1 (eg child seat)	From 9kgs to 18kgs	9 months to 4 years
Group 2 (eg booster seat)	From 15kgs and upwards	From approx 4 years
Group 3 (eg booster cushion)	From 22kgs and upwards	From approx 6 years

baby SEAT

AIRBAGS ARE POWERFUL SAFETY DEVICES. A REAR-FACING BABY SEAT WOULD BE HIT BY A FRONTAL AIRBAG IF IT DEPLOYED - AND COULD BE THROWN UP AND TOWARDS THE REAR OF THE VEHICLE. THIS MEANS THAT THE BABY SEAT AND CHILD COULD BE COMPLETELY UNRESTRAINED DURING A CRASH.



For a very young child, this is the safest type of restraint available. A baby seat is rear-facing and can be fitted in the front or rear of a car using the adult lap-and-diagonal seat belt, or by ISOFix attachment points, following the manufacturer's instructions. A portable baby seat can be convenient to use and to carry, and you are more likely to use it on every journey.

Some baby seats can be converted into forward-facing child seats and may therefore be usable until you child is older.

Note that carrycots with restraint straps do not provide the protection provided by purpose designed baby seats. A baby seat is safer and more convenient, although doctors may occasionally advise the use of a carrycot, e.g. for premature or very low birth weight babies. Only a special carrycot which complies with UN ECE Regulation 44.03 is allowed.

child SEAT

A child seat is a separate seat secured either by an adult seat belt, or ISOFix attachment points. The child is then restrained by the seat's own harness, which has the advantage of being specifically designed for a child. Remember to follow the manufacturer's instructions every time when fitting the child seat.



A child seat harness should include a 'crotch strap' which will prevent the child from sliding out feet first in an accident.

booster SEAT

A booster seat puts a child in the right position so that an adult seat belt gives most protection. Slots guide the adult seat belt straps around a child and must be used as instructed by the manufacturer. Both the booster seat and the child are restrained by the adult seat belt.

Most booster seats are intended to be used with an adult lap-and-diagonal seat belt. Some boosters do not have backs. However, a high-back booster will provide support for the child generally and will give a measure of protection from whiplash injury.



booster CUSHION

This is designed to raise a child so that the adult seat belt can be used safely. It must be used as instructed by the manufacturer.

DO NOT
ALLOW YOUR
CHILD TO USE
ONLY THE
ADULT BELT
TOO EARLY.



EXEMPTIONS FROM SEAT BELT WEARING

There is a specific exemption from seat belt wearing on medical grounds. There are some other exemptions, for example when reversing.

If you think you should not wear a seat belt on medical grounds, please consult your doctor. He/she will decide and, if warranted, will issue you a formal "Certificate of Exemption from Compulsory Seat Belt Wearing". This must be produced if the police ask you for it. For more information see www.thinkroadsafety.gov.uk/advice/seatbelts01.htm

If you are claiming certain benefits you may be entitled to assistance towards the cost of any medical examination for a medical exemption certificate.

For more information on the law on seat belt and child restraint wearing, please contact:

Road User Safety Division
Department for Transport
Zone 2/11, Great Minster House
76 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DR
Tel: 020 7944 2046
Fax: 020 7944 9618
Email: road.safety@dft.gsi.gov.uk

For further information about the fitting and wearing of seat belts and child restraints, and road safety in general, please contact your Road Safety Officer through your local County Council, or in Scotland, your Road Safety Training Officer through your Local Authority or Police Force.

The child car seat web-site at www.childcarseats.org.uk also has information about the law, and the fitted and wearing of child restraints.

Further copies of this leaflet (Product Code T/INF/251) can be obtained by telephoning **0870 122 6236**, or textphone **0870 120 7405**, or emailing **DFTINF@capita.co.uk**

www.dft.gov.uk/think



Always wear a seatbelt

For more information about child car seats and other THINK! road safety campaigns visit www.dft.gov.uk/think

Directgov

Straight through to public services

For wider motoring advice, such as how to renew your car tax online, visit www.direct.gov.uk.
Directgov – public services all in one place.

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