



# New Booster Seat Law

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As of July 1, Michigan law will require that all children must be in a booster seat until they are 8 years old or 4'9" tall.

## Why do children need booster seats?

In 2002, 248,000 kids were injured in car crashes and 1,668 children died. Most of them weren't properly restrained, which means that booster seats could have prevented many of those deaths.

Seat belts are meant to keep us safe. The problem is, seat belts are designed to fit adult bodies and they don't hold our children securely.

That's where booster seats come in. A booster seat does exactly what the name suggests: It boosts your child up so that your vehicle's lap and shoulder belts restrain her

safely. Without a booster seat, an adult seat belt can actually *cause* injury in the event of a crash rather than preventing it.

If the lap belt rests on your child's tummy (which it's likely to do without a booster), for instance, she could suffer stomach, liver, or spleen damage in a crash. And if the shoulder belt rests against her neck rather than her chest, she may try to move it under her arm (where it could crack her ribs and damage internal organs) or behind her back (where it offers no protection at all against head, neck, and spinal injuries).

**The risk of injury for children 4 to 8-year-old is reduced by 59 percent when using a booster seat versus a seat belt alone. Children in seat belts alone are four times more likely to suffer head/brain injuries as compared to those in booster seats, according to Partners for Child Passenger Safety.**

## The statistics and facts

**"I'm just driving to school and back."** — There is a misconception that short trips are safe since you aren't driving fast or far. Here are some facts that might surprise you:

52 percent of traffic fatalities occur on rural, non-interstate roads

75 percent of car crashes occur within 25 miles of home.

60 percent of car crashes occur on roads with speed limits under 40 miles per hour.

While the number of motor vehicle injuries and deaths has been declining as more people use seat belts and car seats, the number of *crashes* continues to go up every year because there are more cars than ever on the road — and more distracted drivers.

Auto crashes are the leading cause of death in children over age 1. Making matters worse, kids these days spend more time in cars than they used to.

When a car experiences a crash at 30 mph, the impact is equivalent to being dropped from the top of a 3 story building.

When a car is moving at just 20 miles per hour, a sudden stop can cause an unrestrained baby to hit the dashboard with a force of up to 400 pounds!

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### Lap Belt Alone

**Never put your child in a seat with just a lap belt** — even if using a booster seat. In an crash, the child's torso will jackknife forward, increasing the chance of head, spine and abdominal injuries.

### Checking your seat

Once your child is in the booster seat and in the car, be sure to check that the seatbelt falls across their body properly. The shoulder belt should cross the child's chest and rest snugly on the shoulder and the lap belt should rest low across the pelvis or hip area — never across the stomach area. The child's ears should not be higher than the vehicle's seat back cushion or the back of the high-back booster seat. Most high-back booster seats can easily be adjusted to increase the seat height when the child needs it.

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## Choosing the right booster seat

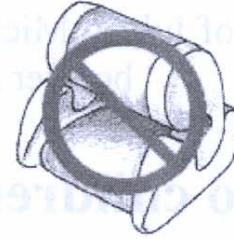
There are two types of booster seats on the market: backless and high-back. The backless seats are less expensive than the high-back seats, however, there are major differences between the two.

**The backless (or low-back) seats** should only be used in vehicles with a seat back/headrest that can support the child's head up to the top of the child's ears. These seats work best in cars with highly contoured back seats.

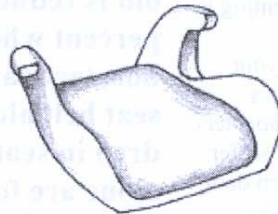
**High-back seats** provide head and neck support and can be used on vehicle seats with or without a headrest. This is a good choice if your child carpools and the seat will be used in many other cars.

If you purchase one booster seat for your family, keep in mind that the seat needs to be compatible with your spouse's car, too. If there is no headrest and the seatbacks are not high in both of your cars, you should go with the high back seat so it can be transferred between cars.

Be wary of secondhand seats: Many of these seats do not meet today's standards. Avoid older combination seats or convertible seats that use plastic tray bars or T-shaped shields. These seats are dangerous in a crash because they distribute the force of a collision to the belly, one of your child's most vulnerable areas.



Shield seat



Backless seat



High-back seat

### Don't rush into a booster seat too soon.

One mistake many parents make is putting their child in a booster seat too soon, before they are truly big enough to use it safely. While the instructions on most car- and booster-seat combos say they can be used without the harness starting at 30 pounds, this is really true only for a very tall, thin child who's grown too tall for the harness but doesn't yet weigh 40 pounds. Most kids can and should continue using the 5-point harness until they reach 40 pounds.

## At 9-years-old, is a seatbelt alone safe?

Not all children are safe at age 9 with just the car seatbelt. To find out if your child is ready to go without a booster seat, take the Safety Belt Fit test. Once you can answer "yes" to these questions, you can put the booster seat away.

- Does your child exceed the booster seat's height and weight limits?
- Does your child pass the Safety Belt Fit Test in all vehicles used:
  1. Have your child sit all the way back on the vehicle seat. Do his or her knees bend at the front edge of the seat? If they bend naturally, go to #2. If they don't, return to the booster seat.
  2. Buckle the lap and shoulder belt. Be sure the lap belt rests on the upper legs or hips. If it does, go to #3. If it rests on the stomach, return to the booster seat.
  3. Be sure the shoulder belt rests on the shoulder or collarbone. If it does, go to #4. If it's on the face or neck, return to the booster seat. Never put the shoulder belt under the child's arm or behind the child's back.
  4. Check whether your child maintains the correct seating position for as long as you are in the car. If your child slouches or shifts positions so the safety belt touches the face, neck or stomach, return your child to the booster seat.