



Department  
for Transport



Always wear  
a seat belt

# 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 fitted. Children up to 12 years old, or up to 135 centimetres in height, are required to use a child car restraint.**

→ Wearing a seatbelt saves hundreds of lives every year. You should wear a seat belt in both the front and rear seats. Wearing a seatbelt in the back is just as important as wearing one in the front of the vehicle.

**If you are sitting in the back of a car without a seat belt and you crash at 30mph, you will hit the front seat – and anyone in it – with a force of 30 to 60 times your own body weight.**

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

**Your compensation for injury resulting from an accident may be reduced if you are not wearing a seat belt.**

## Seat belts: the law

- You must wear a seat belt where one is fitted. There are very few exceptions to this.
- The driver is liable to prosecution if a child aged under 14 years does not wear an appropriate seat belt which, for children aged under 12 years and shorter than 135 centimetres in height, means the correct child restraint.

→ A child may wear an adult seat belt when they reach 135 centimetres in height or the age of 12 years old (whichever is reached first).

**The law in respect of cars, vans and goods vehicles is summarised in the table on the next page.**

	Front seat	Rear seat	Who is responsible?
<b>Driver</b>	Seat belt must be worn if fitted.		<b>Driver</b>
<b>Child under 3 years of age</b>	Correct child restraint must be used.	Correct child restraint must be used. If one is not available in a licensed taxi/private hire vehicle, a child may travel unrestrained.	<b>Driver</b>
<b>Child from 3rd birthday up to 135cms in height (approx. 4ft 5ins), or 12th birthday, whichever they reach first</b>	Correct child restraint must be used.	Where seat belts are fitted, the correct child restraint must be used. Must use adult seat belts if correct child restraint not available: → in a licensed taxi/private hire vehicle; → for a short distance in an unexpected necessity; or → in a car or van (laden weight not exceeding 3.5 tonnes), two occupied child restraints prevent fitting of a third.  A child aged 3 years and over may travel unrestrained in the rear seat of a vehicle if no rear seat belts are fitted and the front seat is occupied.	<b>Driver</b>
<b>Child from 12th birthday, or from over 135cms (approx. 4ft 5ins) in height, until 14th birthday</b>	Seat belt must be worn if available.	Seat belt must be worn if available.	<b>Driver</b>
<b>Passengers aged 14 years and over</b>	Seat belt must be worn if available.	Seat belt must be worn if available.	<b>Passenger</b>

## Exceptions for passengers in buses, coaches and minibuses

A bus or coach has more than 8 seats in addition to the driver's seat, and a maximum laden weight exceeding 3.5 tonnes.

A minibus has more than 8 seats in addition to the driver's seat, and a maximum laden weight not exceeding 3.5 tonnes.

- Passengers in buses, coaches, and minibuses in which standing is permitted, or which are being used to provide a 'local service', are not required to wear seatbelts.
- Children aged under 14 years in the rear seats of buses and coaches are not required to wear seat belts or child restraints.
- In the front seats of buses and coaches – children from 3rd birthday up to 135 centimetres in height or 12th birthday (whichever is reached first), may travel wearing an adult seat belt, if an appropriate child restraint is not available in the front of the vehicle.

## Minibuses

- Children aged 3 to 13 must use a child car restraint if there is one available anywhere in a minibus. Children must use an adult seat belt in the front or rear if child restraints are not fitted or are unsuitable. May travel unrestrained in the rear if no adult seat belts are fitted in the rear of the minibus.
- Children aged under 3 must use a child car seat if there is one available anywhere in a minibus or may travel unrestrained in the rear of the minibus if no child restraint is available.
- No child under the age of 14 may travel unrestrained in the front of a minibus.
- However, where a minibus is used to take groups of 3 or more children aged 3–16 on a trip, it must have enough forward-facing seats fitted with seat belts for every child on the trip. All the children must therefore be wearing a seat belt.

# Which vehicles does the law affect?

- All motor vehicles (except two-wheeled motorcycles), including cars, vans and other goods vehicles, buses, coaches, and minibuses.

# What if there are not enough seat belts available?

- Children up to 135 centimetres in height and under 12 years old must wear 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.
- Carrying more passengers than there are seatbelts in the vehicle may affect insurance cover in the event of an injury.
- If you have passengers without a seat belt remember that they can cause injury to others in an accident.
- In a vehicle without seatbelts (e.g. a classic car), children aged 3 to 11 (and under 135 centimetres in height), can only travel in the rear, and those under 3 years old cannot travel at all.

# Seat belt use

- Lap and diagonal belts provide more protection and should be used before lap only seat belts.
- Adjust the seat belt so that the lap belt is as low as possible across the hip bones – NOT over the stomach.
- Ensure that the diagonal strap lies across the chest and away from the neck.



- It should slope up and back to the top fix point and not be twisted.
- In many cars, you can adjust the height of the top fitting 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 your seat belt is really uncomfortable, ask the vehicle manufacturer if they have a recommended comfort device.

**The centre rear seats of some older 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.
- Do not use child restraints with lap only seat belts as they are usually designed to be used with three-point lap and diagonal seat belts.

**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, 9 and 12).**

## Pregnant women



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

**The lap strap should go across the hips, fitting under the bump, while the diagonal strap should be placed between the breasts and around the bump.**

# Disabled person's belts

- Disabled drivers or passengers (adults and 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 – they are intended for use solely by disabled people.
- Disabled children may need to use child restraints specially designed for them.
- The law allows disabled person's belts or child restraints to be used instead of the standard seat belts and child restraints.

## Airbags

- Airbag systems differ from car to car, always check and follow specific advice from the manufacturer or in the owner's handbook. This is particularly important in relation to children and frontal airbags.
- Studies show that airbags reduce severe head injuries in accidents.



### **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 do not sit too close to the steering wheel or dashboard.
- The distance between the centre of the steering wheel to your breastbone should be at least 25 centimetres (10 inches).
- It is illegal to use a rear-facing child restraint in a front seat which is protected by an active frontal airbag. Make sure you deactivate the airbag before you begin your journey.

# Child restraint systems

**Take time to make sure your child restraints are properly fitted every time you use them.**

- Injuries to children can be significantly reduced by using a suitable child restraint.
- New child restraints must conform to the standards of United Nations ECE Regulation 44 or 129.
- There are several types of child restraints – baby seats, child seats, booster seats and booster cushions.
- You must use the right one for each child.
- Children must use a child seat until they are 12 years old or 135 centimetres tall, whichever comes first.
- Children aged 12 or older, or taller than 135 centimetres, may use an adult seat belt or an appropriate child restraint, although it is safer to use a booster seat to 150 centimetres tall.
- You can choose a child restraint based on your child's height or weight.

## Height-based seats

- Child restraints should be rear-facing until your child is over 15 months old. Your child can use a forward-facing child car seat when they are over 15 months old.
- It is safest to use a rear-facing child restraint up to at least 4 years old.
- You must check the seat to make sure it's suitable for the height of your child.
- To meet current safety standards, height-based child car seats should be United Nations ECE approved. These have a label showing a capital 'E' in a circle and the height range of child for which it is designed.

## Weight-based seats

- The seat your child can use (and the way they must be restrained in it) depends on their weight.
- Child restraints should be rear-facing until your child is over 9kg in weight. Your child can use a forward-facing child car seat when they are over 9kg in weight.
- It is safest to use a rear-facing child restraint up to at least 4 years old.
- To meet current safety standards, weight-based child car seats should be United Nations ECE approved. These have a label showing a capital 'E' in a circle and the weight range of child for which it is designed.
- You may be able to choose from more than one type of seat in the group for your child's weight.



Child's weight	Group	Seats
<b>0kg to 10kg</b>	0	Lie-flat or 'lateral' baby carrier, rear-facing baby carrier, or rear-facing baby seat using a harness
<b>0kg to 13kg</b>	0+	Rear-facing baby carrier or rear-facing baby seat using a harness
<b>9kg to 18kg</b>	1	Rear- or forward-facing baby seat using a harness or safety shield
<b>15kg to 25kg</b>	2	Rear- or forward-facing child car seat (high-backed booster seat or booster cushion) using a seat belt, harness or safety shield
<b>22kg to 36kg</b>	3	Rear- or forward-facing child car seat (high-backed booster seat or booster cushion) using a seat belt, harness or safety shield

Manufacturers are no longer permitted to introduce new models of backless booster seats for children shorter than 125 centimetres or weighing less than 22kg. This doesn't affect existing models of seats or cushions and doesn't mean that they are unsafe, but will mean that the range of products available on the market in future will be better suited for younger children.

**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.**

### Buying a child restraint

- Before buying a child restraint, you should try it in your car to make sure it fits properly. Ask the seller for a demonstration.
- 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 safety standards.

### Installing a child restraint

- Take time to fit a child restraint in your car – do not rush it!
- Always follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- A properly installed restraint fits tightly into an adult seat – push your weight against it while tightening the adult seat belts.
- The seat belt buckle should not bend around the restraint frame.

## **ISOFix attachment points**

- Some vehicles will 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).
- Some ISOFix seats use the seat belt as a third anchorage point.
- They are quicker and easier to install accurately and safely.
- Always check whether a child restraint is suitable for the ISOFix points in your car – some will differ.

## **i-Size attachment points**

- Creates a 'Plug and Play' universal ISOFix child restraint category which provides better compatibility between the car and the child restraint system.
- An i-Size child restraint system will fit in any i-Size ready seating position in a car (it will not be necessary to consult a vehicle fitting list).
- Both the child restraint system and the seating position in the car can be recognised by the i-Size logo.

## **Child restraints and adult seat belts**

- Adult belts are best used for adults 150 centimetres or taller – the law allows children to use adult belts from 135 centimetres in height or 12 years old.
- The law requires that children shorter than 135 centimetres in height or under 12 years old 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.

## **No room for a third child car seat**

- Children under 3 must be in a child car seat. If there's no room for a third child car seat in the back of the vehicle, the child must travel in the front seat with the correct child car seat.
- Children aged 3 or older can sit in the back using an adult belt.

# Baby seat

**Airbags are powerful safety devices. A rear-facing baby seat in a front 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.**

- The safest type of restraint available for early childhood is the child safety seat.
- This is because the bone making process isn't complete until the age of 6 or 7 and throughout childhood a child's skull isn't as strong as that of an adult. A relatively small impact can result in significant injury.
- A restraint system needs to limit forward head movement in a frontal impact and provide protection from intrusion in a side impact.
- These seats can be either forwards or rearwards facing (should be rear-facing to at least 9kg or 15 months, depending on the regulation) and are fitted with an integral harness which secures the child and spreads the crash forces over a wide area.
- They may be fitted using the adult seat belt or where appropriate by the ISOFix system.
- These seats will last from birth to 13kgs and some up to 18kgs.
- Some child restraints can be converted making them suitable for a broader range of child occupants.



**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 than a carrycot, although doctors may occasionally advise the use of a carrycot – for premature or very low birth weight babies. New carrycots must comply with UNECE Regulation 44 or UNECE Regulation 129.

# 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 or safety shield, 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.
- These seats can be either rear or forward-facing to 18kg, some to 25kg.
- Remember it is safest to use a rear-facing seat up to at least 4 years old.



# 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 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 diagonal and lap seat belt.
- Some boosters do not have backs.
- A high-backed booster will provide support for the child and will give a measure of protection from whiplash injury.
- It is safest to use a booster seat until approximately 150 centimetres tall.



# Booster cushion



**Do not allow your child to use only the adult seat belt too early**

- 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.
- It is safer to use a high back booster until the child no longer needs a seat.

# Exemptions from seat belt wearing

- There is a specific exemption from wearing a seat belt on medical grounds.
- Consult your GP if you think you should not wear a seat belt on medical grounds.
- They will decide and, if warranted, will issue you a formal “Certificate of Exemption from Compulsory Seat Belt Wearing”.
- This must be kept in your vehicle at all times and produced if the police ask you for it. You must also inform your insurer.
- For further information on the guidance for GPs when considering this see [www.gov.uk/government/publications/medical-exemptions-from-compulsory-seat-belt-wearing](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/medical-exemptions-from-compulsory-seat-belt-wearing)

- For information on other limited exemptions from wearing a seat belt see [www.gov.uk/seat-belts-law/when-you-dont-need-to-wear-a-seat-belt](http://www.gov.uk/seat-belts-law/when-you-dont-need-to-wear-a-seat-belt)

## Seat belt requirements in campervans

- For information regarding seat belt requirements in campervans see [www.gov.uk/government/publications/carriage-of-passengers-in-campervans/carriage-of-passengers-in-campervans](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/carriage-of-passengers-in-campervans/carriage-of-passengers-in-campervans)



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### Further information

More information on the fitting and wearing of seat belts can be found on the website of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents at [www.rospa.com](http://www.rospa.com)

The child car seat website at [www.childcarseats.org.uk](http://www.childcarseats.org.uk) has information about the law, fitting and wearing of child restraints.

The child car seat safety pages at [www.goodeggsafety.com](http://www.goodeggsafety.com) have further information on safely using child restraints.

Further information about the fitting and wearing of seat belts and child restraints, and road safety in general can be obtained from the Road Safety Officer at your local County Council. Or in Scotland, the Road Safety Training Officer through your Local Authority.

For information about other THINK! road safety campaigns visit [www.think.gov.uk](http://www.think.gov.uk)

For wider motoring advice, including how to renew your car tax online, visit [www.gov.uk/dft](http://www.gov.uk/dft)

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