

Phil's Forum 4/9/08 Boost Up Michigan

My "baby" will be seven years old in just over a month. Two growth spurts in the last six months have him over 4 feet tall - 52 inches to be exact - tall enough for all the good rides at the fair. I think he was about 65 pounds at last weigh-in. He's not the biggest kid in class, but he's certainly in the upper half.

And when I drove him and a classmate on a field trip recently, his friend balked at the fact that I made him sit in a booster seat. "I don't use one in my mom's car," Ian's friend protested.

"You do in my car," I replied.

And thanks to the Michigan legislature and Governor Granholm, many first and second graders will be riding more safely in vehicles. Starting July 1st you can be ticketed for not using an approved child safety restraint for a child under 8 yrs old *and* 80 pounds.

Have you ever sat on a wall or high stool with no place to rest your feet? Have you ever sat on a deep bench where your knees did not reach the end to bend properly? Not fun. You'll squirm, you'll slouch, you'll do anything to get comfortable.

Now put that uncomfortable seat in the back of your car with your 7 yr old. He slouches down until his knees bend comfortably over the front edge of the seat. And in doing so, the lap belt rises up until it rests gently across his stomach (and all the other internal organs there). In this slouched position the shoulder belt rubs irritatingly across his neck, so he pulls it out and slides it behind his back. Ahh, much better. He's comfortable enough to start picking on his 4 yr old sister in the car seat next to him. She starts protesting. You turn quickly to see what the fuss is about while a red Jeep Cherokee pulls out of the driveway ahead of you. Turning back you see the Jeep and slam the brakes, too late. The brakes squeal, and then the sickening crunch of metal. Everything turns white. You felt it more than saw it. But the airbag worked, kept you safe. Your daughter is crying but none the worse for wear. Her five-point harness car seat worked as advertised. But what about your son? What about the belt going across the fleshy part of his anatomy? Or the lack of upper restraint? (Remember, he put the shoulder strap behind his back.) How fast did his head fly forward and hit the back of the front seat? Or worse, his own knees? How much damage was done to those vital organs?

The same child in a booster seat would have been held by a lap belt across the pelvic bone (where it belongs) and a shoulder strap still in place because it was comfortably adjusted to the shoulder, not across the neck.

By now you've seen the ads with the fairy godmother from Cinderella reminding parents that children under 4 ft 9 inches tall need to be in a booster. But still many parents fail to buckle up their children properly. Now the law in Michigan says that your child must be either 4 ft 9 inches tall *or* at least 8 years old *and* 80 pounds to be exempt from a ticket. That's the law. And it's a good one.

But the safety doesn't stop there. I know many children *over* 8 yrs old that are not the magical 4 ft 9 in. If your child is one of them, here's what to do. Take this 4-step test to see if you still need a booster seat.

1. Can your child sit all the way back against the seat back with knees bent comfortably at the edge of the seat?
2. Does the lap belt rest low across the hips?
3. Is the shoulder belt centered on the shoulder and chest?
4. Can the child stay seated like this for the whole trip?

If you answered no to any of these questions, you need a child safety restraint to keep your child safe in the car. Stop in and see the baby department staff to help you choose the appropriate seat for keeping your child safe.

The law is tougher. But you're already doing what you need to keep your kids safe. Right?

Happy (and safe) Shopping (and driving)!

Phil Wrzesinski