

California Child Passenger Safety Law

Guidelines for Law Enforcement Officers and Educators

Some provisions of the law are complicated. It is important to be accurate and consistent with wording used in presentations and written materials.

Basic statement about the law:

Children must ride properly buckled up in safety seats or boosters until they are at least 6 years old OR weigh at least 60 lbs. Exception: a child who weighs over 40 lbs. and is riding in a car without combination lap and shoulder belts in the back seat may wear just a lap belt.

Note: As of January 2005, children will be required to ride in the back seat until they are at least 6 years old OR weigh at least 60 lbs., with some exceptions.

Detailed explanation of the law:

All children under 16 years of age must ride properly buckled up. Children under six years old may ride in a safety belt, properly used, if they weigh more than 60 lbs. However, safety belts do not fit most children properly until they are 8–11 years old.

Boosters fit most children from about age 4 until at least age 8. They must be used with a lap and shoulder belt. Boosters may be purchased from stores that carry other safety seats and baby furniture. There are special products* to protect children...

- over 40 lbs. who are not ready to ride in a booster (under age 3-4 or very active)
- who ride in vehicles without shoulder belts in the back seat
- who are too wide in the hips to fit in a booster, but not tall enough to use a safety belt

Examples of children who are not specifically required to use a safety seat or booster:

Age 3, 65 lbs., in any vehicle	Age 2, 61 lbs., in any vehicle
Age 5, 55 lbs., in a vehicle with no shoulder belts in back	Age 6, 50 lbs., in any vehicle
Age 2, 42 lbs., in a vehicle with no shoulder belts in back	

Suggestions to educators:

Provide a copy of the 5-Step Test* so the parent can determine if the child is big enough to use just a safety belt. Point out that they can be cited if the child puts the shoulder belt under the arm or behind the back. Explain the exemption for children over 40 lbs. in older vehicles with only lap belts in the back seat, which are used by about one-third of the families in California. It is essential to make it clear that the law is a minimum requirement, not a recommendation for parents who want the best protection for their children.

Special products for use in seating positions with no shoulder belts or for children who outgrow conventional safety seats before age 3-4:

1. E-Z-On Vest or Y-Harness (various sizes available; tether strap required)
2. Britax Marathon or Wizard (birth to 65 lbs.)
3. Car Seat Specialty Airway (harness 22-50 lbs.; up to 80 lbs. with lap and shoulder belt)
4. Other seats for larger children are available from Britax and Columbia.

Note: Shoulder belt positioning devices (fabric sleeves, plastic or metal clips) are not certified or regulated to meet federal safety standards. It is illegal to sell them in California (V.C. 27302).

*For more information about boosters, special products for children over 40 lbs., or a copy of the 5-Step Test, call SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A.

SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. P.O. Box 553, Altadena, CA 91003 www.carseat.org 310/222-6860, 800/745-SAFE (English) 310/222-6862, 800/747-SANO (Spanish)
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