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## Cars

# How To Keep Your Kids Safe In The Car

Hannah Elliott, 09.01.10, 4:00 PM ET

Child Safety Week is Sept. 19 - 25, and it's no small cause: Car crashes are the leading cause of death for children 3 to 14 years old, and 2010 is on course to be a record-breaking year for the number of children who die from heat-stroke in parked cars.

"Children are the most precious cargo we can have," says José Alberto Uclés, a spokesman for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, or NHTSA. "We have to keep them safe."

An average of four children under the age of 14 are killed every day in motor vehicle crashes in the United States, Uclés says. But many injuries and fatalities are easily avoidable. Simple things like [locking the power windows](#) and [using a booster seat](#) can make cars much safer for children nationwide.

## In Pictures: How to Keep Your Kids Safe in the Car

### Safety First

We compiled our list of the best ways to keep your kids safe in the car with help from NHTSA, the traffic-safety arm of the Department of Transportation, based in Washington, D.C.

The No. 1 thing to remember when it comes to children and cars? Teach children well. [Rollaway deaths](#), [backover deaths](#) and [trunk entrapment](#) can all be significantly mitigated by teaching them not to play in or around cars, and to move away from a vehicle when a driver gets in and when the car is started.

An important note: Although many cars come with detection devices like backup cameras or radars that emit sounds when they sense an obstruction behind the car, they cannot compensate for the act of circling the vehicle to make sure everything and every one is out of the way.

### Installing Child Seats

Safety seats are another big component of safe [driving with infants](#) and [toddlers](#). Using them in passenger cars reduces fatal injury by 71% for infants and by 54% for toddlers between the ages of 1 and 4. In pickup trucks, fatalities are reduced by 58% for infants and 59% for toddlers.

Vitaly important is ensuring the seats are installed correctly--nearly 75% of them are not, according to NHTSA data. You can find a safety-seat inspector close to your neighborhood by clicking on the [NHTSA website](#). Parents should know that children progress from [rear facing](#), to [front facing](#), to [booster seat](#) to [seat belts](#)--in that order, and according to manufacturer directions for height and body weight. And all children under the age of 13 should ride in the back seat.

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The biggest factor here for parents is resisting the urge to "graduate" their kids prematurely, says Debbi Baer, a labor and delivery

nurse in Baltimore who instructs new parents in how to attach a safety seat.

"We've got to get the public out of the feeling that a developing move is moving the kids to the next stage," Baer says. "Every time you move down a step [to a larger seat], you're actually decreasing the protection."

Even very small infants must be in a child seat, not a sling, soft infant carrier or harness. ("Nothing is safer than a rear-facing seat," Baer says. "The survival rates are absolutely astronomical.")

According to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the safest place in the car for an infant is facing the rear in the middle of the back seat, with the front tilted at a 45-degree angle to help support the baby's large head and weak neck. (If the baby's head slips forward, place a rolled towel under the front edge of the baby carrier and using rolled towels on each side of the baby's head for extra support.)

### **Beat the Heat**

A final precaution: Never leave children or babies unattended in a closed vehicle, even for a minute. The heating and cooling process for toddlers is vastly different than it is for adults, and that makes them particularly susceptible to [overheating in a locked car or trunk](#).

According to NHTSA, even cool outside temperatures in the 60s can cause the car's interior to hit 110 degrees Fahrenheit and higher. (The inside temperature can rise almost 20 degrees within the first 10 minutes.) What's more, children's bodies overheat easily--infants and children under four are among those at greatest risk for heat-related illness--and children are less able to lower their body heat by sweating. That means that inside a hot car, a toddler's body temperature can rise three to five times as quickly as that of an adult, which can lead directly to heatstroke and death.

It's a sobering truth, this year especially: To date there have been 41 children who died from vehicular hyperthermia in 2010--already many more than last year's total of 33.

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