

Booster Seats - Frequently Asked Questions

What is the new Booster Law?

Effective September 1, 2005, all drivers must use booster seats when transporting children weighing 18 to 36 kg (40 to 80 lb.), with a standing height of less than 145 cm (4 ft. 9 in.) or a maximum age of 8 years.

What is a booster seat?

A booster seat is a firm cushion of foam or plastic that lifts the child up to improve the position of the vehicle seat belt. Booster seats should have indents, guides, or arm rests that act as hip bones to keep the lap belt done low on the pelvis, touching the thighs. Children don't develop a strong hip structure until about 9-10 years-of-age. Most booster seats also include a shoulder belt guide or comfort clip that can be used, if necessary, to pull the shoulder belt slightly downward so that it is centred on the child's shoulder and chest. There are backless, high back and removable-back booster seats.

Why does my child need a booster seat?

Children outgrow a typical car seat when they weigh 18 kg (40 lb.). This is usually about 4 years-of-age. But, they are still too small for lap-shoulder belts to fit properly since the seat belt is designed to fit an adult body. As a result, children over 4 to 9-years-of-age have a higher rate of injury than younger children.

The key to using a seat belt safely is *positioning*. If it is used improperly, a seat belt may not provide any protection, or the belt itself can injure a child. For example, children who put the shoulder belt behind them or under their arm can suffer serious injuries to the head, internal organs, or spine in a crash. Similarly, if the lap belt is across the abdomen, serious internal injuries can result. To be more comfortable, small children tend to scoot forward until their legs hang down over the edge of the vehicle seat and they slouch against the seat back. This causes the seat belt to ride up.

Booster seats raise a child up so that the seat belt is properly positioned over the child's body.

How much is the ticket?

All drivers transporting children in vehicles who are not properly restrained in an appropriate booster seat will receive \$110.00 ticket and 2 demerit points. This also applies to non-use, or misuse, of car seats when transporting children under 18 kg [40 lb.].

Are there any exceptions to the Booster Law?

Drivers of taxicabs, buses or public vehicles are exempt from the booster law while transporting a passenger for hire. If the vehicle is leased for less than 60 days or is registered in another jurisdiction, the driver is exempt. Police and emergency vehicles are also exempt.



What if my vehicle has only lap belts?

The abdominal shield-style booster seats, which were designed for use with lap belts, are no longer sold. You will not be ticketed for not using a booster seat if your vehicle has only lap belts. You can:

- a) restrain the child with the lap belt, ensuring that it is worn firmly against the body and touching the thighs.
- b) put the child in the front seat of your vehicle and use a booster seat with the lap/shoulder belt, as long as you do not have an air bag.
- c) use an older model of abdominal shield booster seat with the lap belt according to the manufacturer's instructions. Never use a booster seat with a lap belt only unless permitted by the booster seat manufacturer.

My child is transported to school in a taxi. Does he require a booster seat?

If the taxicab is operated by or under contract with a school board, or other authority in charge of a school, then a booster seat must be used. Similarly, if the child is transported in a public vehicle with a seating capacity of less than 10 that is operated by or under contract with a school board, or other authority in charge of a school, a booster seat must be used. The same applies to the use of car seats for children under 18 kg [40 lb.].

Which type of booster seat does my child need?

All booster seats sold in Canada must meet the Canadian Motor Vehicle Safety Standard 213.2. They are equally safe, when used correctly. The safest seat, therefore, is the one that best fits your child and your vehicle, and is easiest for you to use.

There are three types of booster seats: those that are backless, those that have high backs and those with a removable back. They are designed for children over 18 kg [40 lb.] up to 36 to 45 kg [80 to 100 lb.], depending on the model. They all must be used with lap-shoulder belts. Whichever model of booster seat that you choose, make sure that you try with your child in your vehicle(s), and that you can return it for a full refund, if it is not appropriate.

Backless booster seats are lightweight and less expensive [\$27 - \$40], which makes them convenient for car pooling, school trips, driving around town, etc. They are inconspicuous, i.e. harder to see, and may feel more "grown-up" than high back boosters for the older child. They have arm rests or guides that act as 'hip bones' and keep the lap belt properly positioned on the thighs. Some come with a strap to lower the shoulder belt so that it is centred on the shoulder, if required. [Some vehicles come with a shoulder belt comfort clip that could be used instead.] Backless booster seats work well as long as the child is able to sit upright throughout the trip and the head is supported by the vehicle seat back or head restraint. If the backless booster seat raises the child so that the middle of his ear is above the vehicle's seat back or head restraint, he could be injured in a crash. If this is the case, you should use a high back booster seat.

High back booster seats are fairly light in weight, portable, but more expensive than backless models [\$50 to \$90]. They have arm rests or guides that act as 'hip bones' to keep the lap belt properly positioned on the thighs. They also have a shoulder belt comfort positioner to keep the belt off the child's neck. The better models have an open design of shoulder belt guide. This



allows the seat belt to retract properly after the child leans forward or pulls on the belt. High back booster seats provide head protection for the child if the vehicle seat back is low. Most models have side 'wings' which provide some support for a sleeping child.

Removable-back booster seats are both a high back and backless booster. This type is ideal for use in a wide range of vehicles. They have adjustable head rests that can grow with your child. The head rest helps keep a sleeping child positioned properly and will also position the shoulder belt correctly without preventing it from retracting. Some models are made of polystyrene, which are lighter [but still strong] and easier to carry than the ones made of plastic. The removable-back boosters also have the guides to position the lap belt properly on a child.

Can I use the front seat for a booster seat?

If you have an active air bag in the front seat of your vehicle, as of September 1, 2005, it is against the law to have the booster in the front seat. If you do not have an air bag or it can be deactivated, you may use the front, but remember - child is safer in the "Kid Zone", the back seat!

How can I tell when my child is big enough to use a seat belt without a booster seat?

The key to using a seat belt safely is *positioning*. The lap belt should be across the upper thighs, not up on the abdomen. The shoulder belt should be centered on the shoulder and chest, not across the neck or face. Since seat belts are designed to fit the adult body, a child needs to be the size of a small adult before moving to the seat belt alone.

Whether, or not, your child is ready to use a seat belt without a booster seat depends on the height of your child, the shape of the vehicle seat and where the seat belts are attached to the vehicle. A booster seat should be used until all of the factors below are met:

- ✓ the child is at least 9 years-of-age [for pelvic development],
- ✓ the child has a sitting height of 74 cm (29 in.) [is at least 1.45 m (4ft. 9in.) tall],
- ✓ the child can sit all the way back against the seat back with knees bent comfortably at the edge of the seat,
- ✓ the lap belt rests across the upper thighs,
- ✓ the shoulder belt is centred on the shoulder and chest, *and*
- ✓ the child can stay seated like this for the whole trip

My child is 8 years old and the Booster Law does not apply to her, but she is small for her age. Can I use one of the adjusters that attaches to the belt instead of a booster?

No. Belt positioning devices, such as clips, plastic 'ladder' brackets or fabric sleeves that connect the shoulder and lap portions of the belt, should not be used as a substitute for a booster seat. There are no government safety standards for these devices; no test standards that they must meet. While they might position the shoulder belt in the middle of the shoulder, they pull the lap belt up onto the stomach. Some also create slack in the seat belt. This can lead to serious, or possibly fatal, injuries in a crash. Tests done in the U.S. showed that they reduce the effectiveness of the seat belt.



Should I use a locking clip with my booster seat?

No. The locking clip could injure a child in a booster seat if the metal clip comes in contact with the child's body during a crash. Locking clips are used for car seats to keep the seat belt tight when a vehicle has a continuous loop lap/shoulder belt with a sliding latchplate. The booster seat is designed to allow a child to wear the lap/shoulder belt just as an adult would.

What if my child is too tall for a car seat but doesn't weigh enough for a booster seat?

If your child is not yet 18 kg (40 lb.), he or she should go into a child/booster seat that can accommodate a taller child. These restraints are both a forward-facing car seat and a high back booster seat. Since they use the taller shell of a high back booster, some models can accommodate children who are too tall for an infant/child (convertible) seat, but are not 18 kg (40 lb.). As a forward-facing car seat, these restraints use a five-point harness system and are tethered.

Do I use a tether strap with a booster seat?

No, booster seats do not come with a tether strap. With the combination car seat/booster seats, the tether strap is used only for car seat mode [i.e. with the harness].

The tether strap holds the upper part of the car seat back, helping to reduce the child's forward head motion in a frontal crash. When the child is using a booster seat, the shoulder belt does this job. Using the tether strap could cause injury to the child in a crash.

Using a Booster Seat Safely

Always read the booster seat instructions and your vehicle owner's manual carefully before installing a booster seat.

Install the booster seat in the back seat.

Encourage your child to sit up straight. A child slumped over the side of a booster seat could be injured in a sudden stop, or crash.

Buckle the booster seat in when your child is not in it so that the empty booster will not fly around in a crash.

Never use pillows, books or towels to boost a child in place of a booster seat. In a collision, they will compress, creating slack in the seat belt. The seat belt could ride up on the child's abdomen, or the child could be ejected.

Remember, a booster seat is not a substitute for a car seat for children under 18 kg [40 lb.].

