

Seatbelts and child car seats aren't decorations: use them to save lives

Sometimes taking the right precautions still isn't enough—but what about those times when it would have been?

I'm wondering if that old adage about getting your message across is true: tell them what you're going to talk about, talk about it, then tell them what you talked about.

As I read over the latest findings on child safety seat and seatbelt use, it strikes me that maybe I haven't repeated myself enough. So, I'm going to talk about it again.

Injuries, particularly from car accidents, remain the most common cause of death for Manitoba children. That statistic alone puts most parents on full alert, because I know, as a parent myself, that we would move heaven and earth to protect our children. The sad fact, though, is that sometimes we don't do the right thing, and, even sadder, sometimes the right thing still isn't enough.

The Manitoba College of Physicians and Surgeons in their most recent annual paediatric death review



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Allen

unfortunately reiterated those depressing facts.

Injuries were responsible for 44 per cent of all deaths of children between 29 days and 14 years old in 1998, and motor vehicles were the leading cause of those deaths. Nine children were killed in car accidents that year. The doctors also found motor vehicles accounted for roughly one out of every three teens aged 15 to 17—for a total of 11 teens—who died that year.

Twenty kids. Gone.

Not statistics

Please don't think of them as statistics. I'm asking you to imagine your life if they had been your

children. It's a horrific image and I apologize for it, but I want to make you think about whether you're doing everything possible to protect your children. Parents, we sponsor free car seat inspections around the province. Take advantage of them! In Winnipeg, just drop by any fire hall (Monday to Friday 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.). For the nearest car seat safety check location elsewhere in Manitoba, call MPI's Road Safety office at 1-888-767-7640.

And, once your children are out of car seats and into seatbelts, reinforce the message that the car doesn't move—ever—unless they're belted in.

Which brings me to topic number two: seatbelts. Manitoba is lowest of all the provinces when it comes to buckling up, coming in at a dismal 84.8 per cent.

Question: why don't Manitobans, overall, want to better their odds behind the wheel? I've watched the

cars whizzing by me at the standard 10 km/h or so over the speed limit and, even though I know the statistics, I'm still amazed at the number of seatbelts I see dangling unused. They're not decorations, folks.

Seatbelts reduce risk

Even worse, I've seen parents buckled in while their kids cut loose, commando-style, in the back seat. First, why would they expose their children to that kind of risk, when they obviously feel the need to buckle up themselves? And second, don't they realize the message they're sending—that kids don't have to wear seat belts? So we end up with another generation who feel they don't have to use the safety mechanisms in their cars?

It's a proven fact. Seatbelt usage reduces your risk of serious injury or death by 50 per cent. Is that not incentive enough to think twice next time you turn the engine over, and sacrifice the whole three seconds it

takes to buckle up?

OK, I told you what I was going to talk about, then I talked about it. Now I'm going to tell you what I talked about. People are dying on our roads because we are too casual about seatbelt and car seat use. This has to change. I think now would be a terrific time to start.

I've received heartbreaking letters from people who did everything right, and still suffered terrible losses. Sometimes the unthinkable happens in spite of our best efforts. All I'm asking Manitobans to do is take advantage of the safety measures available, and at least lessen the odds.

Until next week, be **RoadWise**.

Paul Allen is Road Safety Manager for Manitoba Public Insurance. He would like to hear from you. His e-mail address is pallen@mpi.mb.ca and his mailing address is Room 824, 234 Donald Street, Box 6300, Winnipeg, MB R3C 4A4.

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