

Child car seats: Securing your precious cargo



- Choosing a car seat
- Proper installation
- The right fit



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Your child's safety is a priority. Using a child car seat correctly means you're taking one of the best steps to protect your child in a crash.

Knowing which car seat to use at each stage of your child's development can be confusing. The most important thing to remember is to not rush your child from one car seat stage to the next. Children should remain in their current car seat stage, whether it's a rear-facing, forward-facing or booster seat, until they reach its weight or height limit. This information can be found in the car seat manual or on the car seat itself.

Provincial law requires placing children in the appropriate car seat until they're at least 145 cm (4' 9"), 36 kg (80 lb.) or nine years old.

Stage 1 **Rear-facing car seats**

Use a rear-facing seat until your child reaches the maximum weight or height limit of the car seat. Car seats are now available to keep children rear-facing up to 20 kg (45 lb). *Keep your child rear-facing as long as possible. Don't switch too soon as your child's head and neck are still developing.*

Rear-facing seats are the safest place for your child to be because they distribute the impact of a collision along the back of the car seat, which protects your child's fragile head and neck. It's comfortable for your child to sit with their legs bent or crossed.

Installation

The safest position for a car seat is the vehicle's rear middle seat. If you have more than one child, place the youngest in the middle as their smaller bodies aren't strong enough to withstand the impact of a crash.

- Use a seatbelt or Universal Anchorage System (UAS) to install the seat. Don't use both.
- Check the tension where the UAS or seatbelt is routed through the car seat. You shouldn't be able to move it more than 2.5 cm (one inch) in any direction.
- At least 80 per cent of the infant car seat must be in contact with the vehicle seat.
- Check the level indicators to ensure the infant car seat is at a 45 degree angle.

Check the fit

- ✓ The **harness straps** should be in the slot that's **level with or below** your child's shoulders and fit snugly so you can fit only one finger between your baby's collarbone and the straps. The straps should lay flat.
- ✓ The straps should be **at or below** the shoulders to prevent your baby from sliding out of the car seat.
- ✓ The **chest clip** should be at **armpit level**.



Stage 2 Forward-facing child car seats

Once your child reaches the weight or height limit of their rear-facing seat, they can move into a forward-facing seat. Look for a forward-facing seat that will meet the weight and height requirements of your child for as long as possible. Some seats are made for children up to 30 kg (65 lb.). The harness straps in a forward-facing seat are designed so the impact is taken where your child's body is strongest—the shoulders and chest, and then directed down to the hips.

Installation

- The safest position for a car seat is the vehicle's rear middle seat. If you have more than one child, place the youngest in the middle as their smaller bodies aren't strong enough to withstand the impact of a crash.
- The tether strap must **always** be used to secure the top of the car seat to the vehicle.
- Use a seatbelt or UAS to install the seat. Don't use both.
- Check the tension where the seatbelt or UAS is routed through the car seat. You shouldn't be able to move the car seat more than 2.5 cm (one inch) in any direction.

Check the fit

- ✓ The **harness straps** should be in the slot that is **level with or above** your child's shoulders and fit snugly so that you can fit only one finger between your child's chest and the straps. The straps should lay flat.
- ✓ The middle of your child's ears shouldn't come past the top of the seat.
- ✓ The **chest clip** should be at **armpit** level.



Stage 3 **Booster seats**

Once your child reaches the weight or height limit of their forward-facing seat, they can move into a booster seat. Manitoba law requires children to remain in booster seats until they're at least 145 cm (4' 9"), 36 kg (80 lb.) or nine years old. Without a booster seat, a seatbelt rides too high on a child's stomach and neck and can cause serious injuries. Research shows that booster seats compared to seatbelts alone protect children from serious injury by up to 45 per cent.*

How to choose a booster seat

If your vehicle **doesn't have a head restraint**, choose one of the following:

- A high-back booster seat that provides head and neck support. Some models convert from a forward-facing seat with a harness to a high-back booster seat.
- An adjustable booster seat that provides adjustable head and neck support as your child grows.

If your vehicle **has a head restraint**, choose one of the following:

- a fixed high-back booster seat
- a height-adjustable high-back booster seat
- a simple/backless booster seat

Installation

- The safest position for a car seat is the vehicle's rear middle seat. If you have more than one child, place the youngest in the middle as their smaller bodies are not strong enough to withstand the impact of a crash.
- Keep an empty booster seat buckled up to prevent it from moving and hitting you in a sudden stop or crash.

*Source: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 2010

Check the fit

- ✓ The shoulder strap should fit over the shoulder and across your child's chest.
- ✓ The lap belt should sit snug on their hips.
- ✓ The middle of your child's ears shouldn't come past the top of the vehicle's head restraint. The head restraint ensures your child has adequate head and neck protection in a collision.
- ✓ The bend of your child's knees should be in line with the vehicle seat.
- ✓ Never use just a lap belt to secure a child in a booster seat. Always use a shoulder and lap belt.
- ✓ Never allow your child to place the shoulder belt under their arm or behind their back as this can cause serious injury.



Stage 4 Seatbelts

For your child's safety, Manitoba law requires children to remain in booster seats until they're at least 145 cm (4' 9"), 36 kg (80 lb.) or nine years old. It's important not to rush to using a seatbelt alone because it's not designed for a child—the shoulder strap rides too high and could cause serious injuries.



Check the fit

- ✓ Sitting up straight, the seatbelt should fit across your child's shoulder and chest and sit low across the hips.
- ✓ The middle of your child's ears shouldn't come past the top of the vehicle's head restraint. Adjust the head restraint to ensure your child has adequate head and neck protection in a collision.
- ✓ The bend of your child's knees should be in line with the vehicle seat.
- ✓ Never allow your child to place the shoulder belt under their arm or behind their back as this can cause serious injury.

Important tips about car seats

- Check the expiry date before purchasing. An expired car seat may not protect your child because over time the plastic may crack, reducing its ability to withstand a crash. Most seats are stamped with the expiry date on the back or bottom of the seat. If you can't find the date, contact the car seat manufacturer.
- Buy your car seat in Canada to ensure it meets Canada's Motor Vehicle Safety Standards. Look for the National Safety mark (pictured).
- Check if the car seat has been recalled on Transport Canada's website at tc.gc.ca.
- Child car seats and booster seats are exempt from provincial sales tax.



Quick reference guide

Use this chart to find out which car seat is best for your child.



1 Rear-facing child car seat

Use a rear-facing car seat from birth until your child reaches the maximum weight or height limit listed on their car seat. Some seats are made for children up to 20 kg (45 lb.). *Keep your child rear-facing as long as possible. Don't switch too soon as your child's head and neck are still developing.*



2 Forward-facing child car seat

Use a forward-facing car seat until your child reaches the maximum weight or height limit listed on their car seat. Some seats are made for children up to 30 kg (65 lb.).



3 Booster seat

Use a booster seat once your child reaches the maximum weight or height limit listed on their car seat. *Provincial law requires placing children in the appropriate car seat until they're at least 145 cm (4' 9"), 36 kg (80 lb.) or nine years old.*



4 Seatbelt

Use a seatbelt only when your child is more than 145 cm (4' 9"), 36 kg (80 lb.) or nine years old. Children should sit in the back seat until they are at least 13 years of age.

Multi-stage seats can extend the use of a car seat and can provide the safety your child needs at each stage of their development.

Proper placement and installation are important

Unfortunately, approximately half of child car seats and booster seats are used incorrectly.* Always refer to your car seat and vehicle owner's manuals and take advantage of one of Manitoba Public Insurance's free car seat inspections. All technicians are nationally certified through St. John Ambulance. Find a list of certified fire halls that offer free child car seat inspections at mpi.mb.ca.



St. John Ambulance

*Source: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 2015

For more information about child car seats please call:
In Winnipeg: 204-985-8737
Outside Winnipeg: 1-888-767-7640
mpi.mb.ca



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