Air bags can be dangerous to children 12 and under. Passenger-side air bags inflate at speeds up to 140 miles per hour (mph) -- faster than the blink of an eye. That blast of energy can severely hurt or kill children 12 and under who are too close to the air bag during inflation. If a child is unbelted, too small for the lap and shoulder belt to fit properly, or incorrectly restrained or positioned in a child safety seat, there is a danger that the child will be too close to the dashboard during the instant that the air bag inflates. This could result in serious injury or death. Pre-crash braking and steering are the usual reasons they move too close to the dashboard. This turns a minor 10 mph crash into a 140 mph head impact with the air bag.

The safest place for children 12 and under to ride is in the back. *An infant in a rear-facing safety seat must never be placed in the front seat of a motor vehicle with a passenger-side air bag.* During a forward impact, the rapidly inflating air bag could strike the safety seat with enough force to seriously injure or kill the infant. Infants, under one year of age and about 20 pounds, must ride in rear-facing child safety seats placed in the back seat of the vehicle. They are especially at risk in cars with passenger side air bags. Never place an infant facing forward -- the child's head and neck muscles cannot tolerate the crash forces.

Forward-facing convertible safety seats are used with toddlers over the age of one and weighing 20 pounds. These seats typically place the child at least several inches closer to the dashboard than the normal adult seating position, and therefore should be placed in the back seat. If it is absolutely necessary to place a forward-facing safety seat in the front of a vehicle with a passenger-side air bag, the vehicle seat should be adjusted as far back as possible from the dashboard. Make sure the child is secured snugly in the child safety seat and that the child safety seat is secured tightly against the vehicle seat back.

Car booster seats should be used with children who have outgrown their convertible safety seat but do not fit correctly in a lap/shoulder belt. They should be securely restrained in the rear seat.

Older children, who fit correctly in a lap/shoulder belt, should be securely restrained in the vehicle's rear seat through age 12.

In summary, all children 12 years old and under are safest when properly restrained in the back seat of the vehicle. Children are up to 29 percent safer riding in the back seat versus the front seat, *whether the vehicle has an air bag or not.*

Join Forces With Others in Your Community to Get the Word Out.

The goal is to ensure that everyone knows that children are safest when they are belted properly in the back seat of a car -- especially when that car is equipped with a passenger-side air bag.

The most effective way to get this message out is by building a communication network through community partnerships!

Your community's partnership possibilities are endless. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is currently cooperating with the auto industry, insurance agencies, and air bag manufacturers, as well as several health and safety groups throughout the United States, to bring national attention to the issue of air bag safety. Which groups can join forces in your community?

HEALTH PROFESSIONALS can join BUSINESSES, such as car dealerships or department and discount stores who sell child safety seats, to educate consumers on the safety features of their new product.

GOVERNMENT AGENCIES, such as local transportation officials, can discuss with CIVIC GROUPS the benefits of seat belts and air bags, explaining the safety measures that need to be followed.

EDUCATORS can invite PUBLIC SAFETY OFFICIALS, including law enforcement and fire and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) personnel, to speak with students or parent-teacher groups to explain the functions of an air bag safety system and the factors that make it effective for some individuals, but not everyone.

These are just a few examples. Take the initiative to discuss this serious safety issue with others. You may be surprised how many COMMUNITY PARTNERS are ready to join you in educating your community!

For more information on forming partnerships, look for the "How-To Guide to Coalition Building," which is included in this planner.

Become Familiar With Existing Air Bag Safety Resources

The Air Bag Safety Campaign, a public/private partnership of automobile manufacturers, insurance companies, child safety seat manufacturers, occupant restraint manufacturers, government agencies, health professionals, and child health and safety organizations, has developed a basic air bag message that is simple to teach and remember:

Air bag safety -
Buckle everyone!
Children in back!

The goals of the Campaign are to inform the public about how to maximize the lifesaving capabilities of air bags while minimizing the risks and to increase the proper use of safety belts and child safety seats. The centerpiece of this effort is the national mobilization of public safety and law enforcement agencies to deliver the "ABC" message. The Campaign also encourages alliances with children's, safety, religious, and other community-based organizations and corporate partnerships to reach employees and consumers.

The Air Bag Safety Campaign has developed a one-page envelope stuffer that briefly outlines the advantages of air bags and the safety benefits of securing children in the back seat. It promotes the "ABC" message and the safety points listed below.

- An infant should never be placed in a rear-facing child safety seat in the front seat -- the position of the seat is too close to the deploying air bag.
- Children riding in the front seat are also at deadly risk if they are improperly belted, completely unbelted, out of position, or too small for the safety belt to fit correctly. In a crash, or during pre-crash braking, they can easily slide forward on the seat, and the inflating air bag could hit them in the head or neck.
- Experts advise that the safest way for children to ride is buckled up in age- and size-appropriate safety seats in the back seat.Children are up to 29 percent safer riding in the back seat versus the front seat, whether the vehicle has an air bag or not.
- Drivers and all adult passengers, particularly people of short stature, should make sure they are properly belted and that the front seat is moved back as far as practical.

The Air Bag Safety Campaign's envelope stuffer is included in this Planner. A five-page Air Bag Safety Action Kit, which contains this handout and additional information, is available by calling the Air Bag Safety Campaign at (202) 625-2570.

The following information is designed to give basic air bag safety tips and answer the most commonly asked questions addressing air bag safety issues. If you, or someone you know, receives calls concerning air bag safety, use this sheet as a quick, accurate reference. For more information or answers to other air bag-related questions, contact the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's (NHTSA) Auto Safety Hotline at 1-800-424-9393 or http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov.

Basic Safety Tips

The back seat is the safest place for children of any age to ride.

Never put an infant (less than one year old) in the front of a vehicle with a passenger-side air bag.

Infants must always ride in the back seat facing the rear of the car.

Make sure everyone is buckled up. Unbuckled occupants can be hurt or killed by an air bag.

Questions and Answers

Q: Should I put a rear-facing infant restraint in the front seat of a vehicle with a passenger side air bag?

A: No. Unless the vehicle is equipped with a cut off switch for the air bag and the air bag is shut off, under absolutely no circumstances should a parent place a rear-facing infant restraint in front of an air bag. There is an extremely high risk of severe injury or fatality in this situation, and a child should never be subjected to this risk. Even if the air bag is shut off or there is no air bag, the safest place for all children 12 and under is in the rear seat.

Many parents are concerned about having an infant rear-facing in the rear seat. However, the American Academy of Pediatrics stresses that a healthy baby buckled correctly in a rear-facing child seat is as safe as a baby placed in a crib for a nap or overnight sleep. The risk of serious injury in a crash is much greater than the risk of a healthy baby having a life-threatening health problem during a car ride. If no rear seat is available in which to place the rear-facing child restraint, and another mode of transportation is available, consider using that alternative.

Q: Should I put a forward-facing child safety seat in the right front seat with an air bag? Will the child be safe if the air bag deploys?

A: NHTSA recommends placing all children 12 and under in the rear seat. That is the safest place. If no option exists other than seating a young child in the front seat, several steps must be taken. First, the child needs to be properly restrained in the child seat. Second, the vehicle seat needs to be pushed all the way back, to maximize the distance between the child and the air bag.

Q: My child is too old for a child seat. Should I allow my child to ride in the front seat with an air bag? Will the child be safe if the air bag deploys?

A: NHTSA recommends placing all children 12 and under in the rear seat. That is the safest place. If no option exists other than seating them in the front seat, several steps need to be taken. First, the child needs to be properly restrained. This means a booster seat plus a lap/shoulder belt or a lap/shoulder belt alone for larger children, depending on the size of the child. Second, the vehicle seat needs to be pushed all the way back, to maximize the distance between the child and the air bag. Third, the child needs to be sitting with his or her back against the seat back, not wiggling around or leaning forward, with as little slack as possible in the seat belt in order to minimize forward movement in a crash.

Questions and Answers About Air Bag Safety

Q: I'm a short person, so I sit very close to the steering wheel. What can I do to avoid serious injuries from the air bag?

A: It is important to remember that the number of drivers killed by air bags is small and that many more drivers are saved by air bags than are killed by them. A majority of the drivers killed by an air bag were not using their safety belts. Others were positioned too close to the steering wheel at the time of the air bag deployment.

All drivers need to be properly belted and sit as far away from the air bag as possible to allow the air bag to deploy. Air bag risk is minimal if a driver can sit 10 to 12 inches or more away from the steering wheel. Short drivers should move the driver's seat rearward to allow space between the driver's chest and the steering wheel, and the seat back should be tilted back slightly. To the extent possible, the driver should hold the steering wheel from the sides so that his or her arms aren't between the driver and the air bag. This arm positioning reduces the risk of arm and hand injuries. While NHTSA has not analyzed the ease of use or safety implications of pedal blocks or extenders, it is aware that they are available for use by short stature drivers.

Q: Is it safe for short adults to be seated in the front passenger seat of a vehicle equipped with a passenger-side air bag?

A: Yes. However, all passengers should be properly restrained, regardless of size. All front seat passengers (adults and children) should move the seat as far rearward as possible, and recline the seat back slightly. In order to allow the air bag to deploy safely, front seat passengers should avoid leaning or reaching forward and should remain seated against the vehicle seat back, with as little slack in the belt as possible to minimize forward movement in a crash.

Q: Is it safe for elderly people to be seated in front of an air bag?

A: Elderly people, like all other drivers and front seat passengers, should be properly restrained and should move the seat as far rearward as possible, being careful to remain seated against the vehicle seat back and keeping the arms away from the area in which the air bag will deploy.

Q: I am pregnant. Is it safe for me to be seated in front of a air bag?

A: NHTSA is currently reviewing the effect of air bags on pregnant women. NHTSA currently recommends that pregnant women wear their seat belts. The shoulder portion should be positioned over the collar bone. The lap portion should be placed under the abdomen as low as possible on the hips and across the upper thighs, never above the abdomen. Also, pregnant women should sit as far from the air bag as possible.

U.S. Department of Transportation

For more information or answers to other air bag-related questions, contact NHTSA's Auto Safety Hotline at 1-800-424-9393 or http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov.

If you would like further information on air bag safety, NHTSA has two educational videos and two brochures that address the issue of air bag safety and children.

Protecting Your Newborn

This educational video addresses child passenger safety and other safety issues for newborns. It is for use with expectant parents in pre-natal classes, contacts at an obstetrician's office, or as hospital in-house video. The video discusses safety issues of vital interest to expectant parents for their newborn child, with the primary emphasis on transportation safety. Video: Item #1A0116. Instructor's manual: Item #1P0050.

Are You Using it Right?

This six-panel foldout brochure describes the correct positioning of child car seats. Item #1P0040.

Transporting Children Safely in Child Care

This educational video instructs child care providers how to safely transport children in their care and how to teach the families of these children correct passenger safety procedures. Item #1A0120.

Air Bag Alert!

This eight-page handout warns the public about the danger air bags can present to children riding in the front seat of vehicles with passenger side air bags. Item #1P0046.

Orders for these items should be mailed to:

Campaign Safe & Sober
400 7th Street, S.W.
NTS-21
Washington, DC 20590
Orders may be faxed to:
(202) 493-2062 or (202) 366-2766
For more information, check out the NHTSA web site at
http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov.

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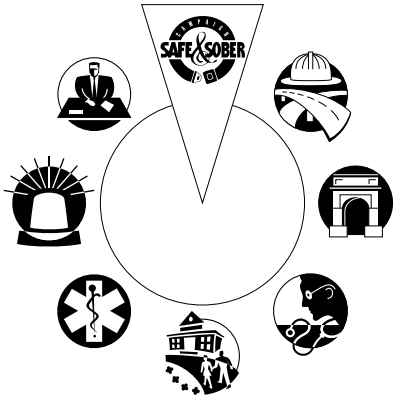
Air bags -- when combined with lap and shoulder safety belts -- have saved many lives and prevented many injuries in motor vehicle crashes. Recently, there have been questions raised about the safety of air bags. The facts, however, speak for themselves. There have been over 800,000 air bag deployments, saving over 1,500 lives. To date, completed investigations of air bag crashes show that many of the air bag injuries were due to the driver sitting too close to the air bag module or passengers riding unbuckled or incorrectly secured. The latter includes infants in rear-facing child safety seats that are placed in the front seat or small children incorrectly placed in a lap/shoulder safety belt.



In 1996 alone, 600 lives were saved by air bags. During this same period, eight children died -- all of whom were incorrectly restrained or not restrained at all. Many people who transport children in cars do not understand how air bags work. They fail to fully appreciate the threat passenger-side air bags pose to young children and do not realize why they must take steps to protect children up to 12 years of age. The bottom line: children and air bags do not mix. Air bags could seriously injure or even kill children who are in the front seat.

In addition, short stature adults are also at risk when positioned too close to the air bag module, especially when unbuckled. There have been over 20,000 air bag deployments in which the driver was under five feet tall. In these cases, there have been nine fatalities -- all of whom were positioned too close to the air bag or unbelted. Air bag risk is minimal if a driver can sit 10 to 12 inches or more away from the steering wheel.

To decrease the number of injuries and deaths caused by the combination of air bags and improperly restrained children, as well as those attributed to motorists being improperly secured, drivers must be made aware of correct safety procedures.

You can help by educating your community on air bag safety!

Learn the Facts

Air bags save lives. Air bags in passenger cars and light trucks prevented an estimated 1,136 fatalities from 1986 to 1995, with another 600 saved in 1996. Once these life saving devices are equipped in all cars, it is estimated that 3,000 lives will be saved each year.

Driver-Side Air Bags
Driver-side air bags reduce the overall fatality risk of car drivers by a statistically significant 11 percent. In other words, a fleet of cars equipped with driver-side air bags will have 11 percent fewer driver fatalities than the same cars would have had if they did not have air bags. Still, air bags can be dangerous to short stature adults sitting too close to the air bag module, especially when unbuckled.

Passenger-Side Air Bags
Passenger-side air bags reduce the overall fatality risk of car passengers age 13 and older by a statistically significant 13.5 percent. It is estimated that an additional 88 right front passengers ages 13 and older would have died from 1986 to 1995 if passenger cars or light trucks had not been equipped with passenger-side air bags. To date only one passenger, a 98-year-old female, has died as the result of an adult passenger-side air bag-related injury.

Help Educate Your Community on Air Bag Safety