



Media Release
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Changes to Child Restraint Laws

From 1 November, child restraint laws are changing to improve the safety of children travelling in vehicles.

The law change will require that all children up to the age of seven to be correctly secured in an approved child restraint. Currently the law requires that children under five must be in an approved child restraint.

“It is fantastic the age is increasing from five to seven, however only 10% of New Zealand children aged seven are actually tall enough to not need a booster seat,” says Carolyn Bennison, Youth Road Safety Advisor for Selwyn District Council, who is a certified child restraint technician.

“There is such a huge variance in the height of children, with a seven year old child ranging from 113 to 131cm tall. Child safety advocates recommend that children use a booster seat until they are 148cm tall or 12 years old or when they pass the five step test, whichever comes first.”

Seat belts are designed to fit an adult body, and if children use an adult seatbelt that does not fit them correctly, their bodies move more than they should. The seat belt cuts across the neck and the lap belt sits across the stomach, and children tend to slouch. When using adult seatbelts, children are at an increased risk of severe head injuries, injuries to the abdominal organs, spinal fractures and of paralysis due to damage to the spinal cord.

“I have heard some parents say that booster seats are inconvenient or that their children think it is uncool, but how much more inconvenient would it be to care for a child that was severely injured or paralysed?,” Mrs Bennison says.

“Child restraints are there to protect our children in the event of a crash, which is always a risk every time you are on the road.”

The Five Step Test

1. Does the child sit all the way back against the vehicle seat?
2. Do the child's knees bend comfortably at the edge of the vehicle seat?
3. Does the belt cross the shoulder between the neck and the arm?
4. Is the lap belt as low as possible, touching the thighs?
5. Can the child stay seated like this for the whole trip?

If the answer is no to any of these questions, the child needs to be in a booster seat.

Booster seats with a back and adjustable head height to cater for children up to 148cm tall and up to 36kg are available from \$110. For more information about child restraints, contact Carolyn Bennison at the Council on (03) 347 2800 or e-mail carolyn.bennison@selwyn.govt.nz

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