

Infant Car Seats

The law says you must have an infant car seat, or safety seat, to bring your baby home from the hospital. You must use the seat any time you take your baby in the car.

Shopping Tips

- Buy a new infant car seat, if you can. You can choose an infant-only seat, which is always used rear-facing. You can also choose a convertible seat. These start out rear-facing but can change to a front-facing seat when your baby gets bigger. All infants and toddlers should ride in a rear facing seat until they are two years old or reach the highest weight or height allowed by their car seat manufacturer.
- Look for a model with a five-point harness (two shoulder straps, two leg straps, and one crotch strap).
- Try the seat in your car before you buy it. Not all car seats work in every car. Also, make sure the car seat does not move more than 1 inch in any direction once installed.
- If you want to take your baby out of the car in the seat or use the seat with a stroller, buy an infant seat that clicks into a separate base. You can leave the base in the car. If you use more than one car, you can buy a base for each car.
- Send in the registration card. That way, you will be told if the seat is recalled for safety problems.

If you get a used infant seat, make sure:

- It is less than 6 years old. Look for a label on the seat that indicates the date it was made.
- It has never been in a crash. It's important to know the history of the seat.
- It has not been recalled. You can check at: <http://www.recalls.gov/>
- It has labels explaining proper installation and the seat's weight and height limits.
- It has the instruction manual.
- If you don't have all of the above information **do not** use the car seat.

Safety Tips

Installing the car seat in the car

- Read the owner's booklets for both the seat and your car before you install the seat.
- Install the seat rear-facing for an infant.
- Check the strap adjustments for your baby's size.
- Get a free inspection to make sure the seat is installed right. For child safety seat fittings at no charge contact Safer New Mexico Now at 505-856-6143 to make an appointment. You can also go to <http://www.nhtsa.gov/> to find an inspection center near you.

Putting your baby in the car seat

- Place your baby in the seat and fasten the harness.
- Make sure the harness straps are straight and snug.
- For rear-facing seats, use the harness slot at, or just below, your baby's shoulder. The chest clip should be at the same level as the child's armpits.
- If your baby needs a blanket or thick coat, put it over or on her after she is strapped in.

More car safety tips

- Put loose items in the trunk, or strap them down with cargo anchors. Loose items can fly around in the car and hurt your baby if you have to stop suddenly or you are in a crash.
- Replace the car seat right away if it is in an accident.
- **Never** leave your baby alone in the car. A car can get very hot, even on a cloudy day.
- To help you remember that your baby is in the car, put a soft toy in the front seat. Or secure something you need, such as a purse or backpack, in the backseat near your baby as a reminder.

Looking Ahead

As your baby grows, you will need to change the car seat.

All infants and toddlers until 2 years of age	Use a rear-facing car seat until they are two years old or meet the maximum height or weight for their car seat. Infant seats are now typically rated to 30 or 40 pounds, and many convertible seats have rear-facing limits as high as 40-50 pounds. It's best to leave children rear-facing as long as possible up to the weight and height limits for their car seat.
Toddlers & Preschoolers	This is the point when you can transition to a forward-facing seat, but it's best to keep kids rear-facing as long as the seat will allow (see above). With a forward-facing safety seat, use it with a five-point harness and attach the top tether strap. Check the weight and height limit for their car seat. Use for as long as possible, up to the highest weight or height allowed by the car seat manufacturer.
School age children	When your child's weight or height is more than the forward facing limit of their car seat you should transition them to a seat belt-positioning booster. (There are some seats in this weight range that still allow you to use the five-point harness.) They should stay in a booster until the vehicle seat belt fits properly. Usually this is when they are 4 feet and 9 inches in height and are between 8 and 12 years old. All children under 13 should sit in the back seat of the car.
Older children	For the best protection the child should ride in the back seat using the lap and shoulder seat belts. All children under 13 years old should sit in the back seat. Front-seat air bags can injure children.

Important Reminders

- Always wear your seat belt. Children watch what you do. Be a good role model. Never start driving until all passengers are buckled up safely.
- Make sure any one driving your baby or child knows how to properly use the car seat or seat belt. Always buckle up.
- Never leave your baby or child alone in or around cars.
- Always read the car seat manual and follow your car's owner manual on proper car seat installation.