

# Choosing a Car Seat: What You Need to Know



## 5 Quick Facts

- 1) No one seat is the "best" or "safest". The best seat is one that fits your child, fits well in your car and is installed correctly.
- 2) Make certain your child stays within the height and weight requirements of the car seat you use.
- 3) **Never** purchase used car seats. You will have no idea if the seat was ever in a crash or altered after it was purchased.
- 4) Use the seatbelt or the LATCH anchors to hold the seat, **never** use both.
- 5) Never turn your child forward-facing before one year **and** 20 pounds. It is safer to leave your child rear-facing longer than the one year guideline.

Macomb County Health Department offers FREE car seat inspections.

Call for an appointment (586) 412-3398 or visit us on the web at:

<http://www.macombcountymi.gov/publichealth/hpdc/childpassengersafety.htm>

## Types of car seats

For newborns and children under one year of age, there are two basic styles of rear-facing car seats, infant carriers and convertible seats. An **infant carrier** typically has a base that stays in the vehicle at all times and the carrier snaps in and out for convenience.



Infant carriers have minimum and maximum weight and height requirements. Your child must fit within these requirements to safely use the seat. Infant carriers can only be used rear-facing.

**Convertible car seats** stay in the vehicle and do not have a removable carrier. They are designed to hold children as small as 5 pounds and generally have an upper weight limit of 30-35 pounds, when used rear-facing. Convertible car seats can also be turned around to a forward-facing position when needed. The forward-facing weight limit varies based on seat style, but most commonly range from 40-65 pounds.



**Forward-facing combination seats** do not have the ability to be used rear-facing, however, they do convert to belt-positioning boosters. The height and weight limits vary, again, based on the brand and style of seat. Most seats have a 20 or a 22 pound minimum weight requirement, some also have a minimum height requirement. After a child reaches the maximum height or weight limit for the harnesses, the seat should be converted to a booster as the car seat manual indicates.



## Types booster seats

**High back booster seats** generally have a 30 pound lower weight limit and an 80-100 upper weight limit depending on the type of seat. High back boosters have an adjustable shoulder belt routing guide, and the lap belt generally goes under the arm rests, right across the upper thighs. Booster seats (high back or backless) are designed to simply lift the child up so the vehicle seatbelt fits properly. They are generally not affixed to the vehicle.



**Backless booster seats** are simply a much smaller version of the high back boosters. They are used in the same way as a high back booster, but the vehicle seat must have a high seat back or a headrest to support the child's head and neck and cannot be used otherwise. For most backless boosters, children must be at least 40 pounds and 40 inches tall. Check the manual before using the seat with a child smaller than those guidelines.

## Choosing a car seat or booster seat

At the present time, there are over 50 different car seats and boosters on the market. The right seat for your child does not necessarily have to be the most expensive seat on the shelf. When choosing a car seat or booster seat, remember these simple guidelines.

- The best seat is the one that fits your child, is used correctly and is installed correctly in your car.
- Never purchase a used car seat. It is impossible to know if the seat was in a crash or was altered in any way.
- If possible, ask the store to allow you to place the seat in the your car prior to purchasing it. Not all car seats will fit in all cars.
- Children under one year of age and 20 pounds **must** be rear-facing. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children remain rear-facing until they reach the highest weight or height limit allowed by the car seat.
- When looking at forward-facing car seats, make sure your child meets the minimum height and weight requirements of the car seat and look for a seat with a 5-point harness.
- After your child outgrows their harnessed car seat, move them to an appropriate booster seat. Michigan law requires children under 8 years of age **or** 4'9" ride in a car seat or booster seat.

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