



Frequently asked questions about using a booster seat

Who should use a booster seat and why?

Who should use a booster seat?

Children who weigh at least 18 kg (40 pounds) and who are at least 4 years old with the maturity to sit correctly should use a booster seat once they have outgrown their 5-point harness. Children should continue to use a booster seat until they are 145 cm (4 feet 9 inches) tall and fit the adult seat belt correctly.

Why should my child use a booster seat?

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death and serious injury for children in Canada. Using a booster seat correctly provides 60% more protection over a seat belt alone.

How does a booster seat work?

A booster seat boosts your child up so that the seat belt fits across the strongest bones and away from the soft belly.

What are the risks of not using a booster seat?

Children who use the adult seat belt too soon are at risk of severe injuries in a crash. Doctors call these injuries “seat belt syndrome,” and they include injuries to the head, neck, spinal cord and internal organs.

How do these injuries happen?

Without a booster seat, the lap belt rides up on a child’s belly and causes internal injuries in a crash. When a shoulder belt doesn’t fit correctly, it will be uncomfortable and a child will unsafely place it behind his or her back or tuck it under the arm causing injuries to the head, neck and spinal cord in a crash.

Are seat belts unsafe? Should I stop using them?

No. A seat belt will still prevent a child from being ejected from the vehicle, but, without a booster seat to position the seat belt properly, the seat belt alone cannot protect your child from being severely injured inside the car.

What about taxis and carpooling? Does my child always have to use a booster seat?

Children who need to use a booster seat must use one on every ride. This includes when travelling with grandparents, friends and in taxis. Whenever an adult transports a child he or she is responsible for that child to be buckled safely.

There is no trip short enough to skip the booster because most crashes happen within a 10 minute drive from home! Some booster seats cost less than \$20!

When should my child start using a booster seat?

When should a child start using a booster seat?

Before moving to a booster seat your child must weigh at least 18 kg (40 pounds) and should be at least 4 years old.

Your child must also be able to sit straight and tall and have the maturity to never meddle with the seat belt or unbuckle it. Some children may not be ready to use a booster seat safely until they are 6 years old or more.

My child has outgrown the 5-point harness seat but is not yet ready for a booster. What should I do?

Children who do not yet weigh 18 kg (40 pounds) or who cannot yet sit properly in a booster seat for the whole trip will need to use a 5-point harness that fits their growing height and weight. Some car seats can be used with a 5-point harness until a child weighs 30 kg (65 pounds). Look for a seat with straps that come above the child's shoulders.

My child is 3 years old, but weighs over 18 kg (40 pounds). Can I use a booster?

A 3 year old is not safe in a booster seat. Some children may be ready at 4 years old; others might be 6 years old or older before they have the maturity to use a booster seat safely.

What does the law say about when my child can start to use a booster?

A child must use a seat with a 5-point harness until he or she is at least 18 kg (40 pounds). The law also states that the seat must be used according to the directions. There are height and age minimums for when each booster seat can be used.

How do I use a booster seat correctly?

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- Fasten the lap belt low across the pelvis and pull up to remove any slack.
- Make sure that the belt goes under the armrests when directed by the instructions.
- Make sure the shoulder belt is across the chest and centered between the neck and shoulder.
- The child should sit straight and tall and never lean out of the seat belt or booster seat.
- An adult should check every time a child buckles his or her own booster seat.

A booster seat can only be used with a lap AND shoulder belt.

A child must have head support to the tops of his or her ears. This can come from a high vehicle-seat back, the vehicle's built-in headrests or a high-back booster seat.

Always read the instructions that came with your booster seat.

Check your car manual in the section for seat belts to make sure that you are using a seating position that permits the use of booster seats.

Can I use a booster seat in a seating position with a lap belt only?

No. A booster seat can only be used with a lap AND shoulder belt. Reserve the lap-only belt position for a car seat only.

Can I use a booster seat on a side-facing jump seat?

No. A booster seat can only be used on a forward-facing vehicle seat with a lap AND shoulder belt.

Can I use a seatbelt extender for a booster seat?

No, it is never safe to use a seatbelt extender with a booster seat. The extender changes the location of the buckle, which then changes the starting point and angle of the shoulder belt, which could lead to an injury.

What booster seat should I buy?

Are all booster seats safe?

Both high-back and backless booster seats sold in Canada are tested to the same standard and are safe when used as directed. All boosters lift the child up and have some way to guide the seat belt and keep it in place.

What kinds of booster seats are available to buy?

Some car seats convert to a booster seat. The 5-point harness will be removed for the seat to be used in booster seat mode with the seat belt.

A backless booster seat does not have a back. It lifts the child up so that the lap belt fits low across the child's hip bones. It may come with a shoulder-belt adjuster strap.

A high-back booster seat will have a high back that may or may not be adjustable to different heights. There will be a path for the shoulder belt as well.

What is the difference between a high-back booster seat and a backless booster seat?

The biggest difference is the most obvious one: head support. A backless booster seat doesn't have a back and must be used with a high vehicle seat or vehicle headrest. A child must have head support to the tops of his or her ears – a high-back booster can provide that support. After the high back has been outgrown by height or fit, the child may still require a booster seat and may need to move to a seating position that has an adjustable headrest.

Check the manual of your high-back booster seat to make sure it does not require additional head support behind it.

Are there any other benefits to using a high-back booster seat?

To use a booster seat correctly children must sit straight and tall and not lean out of a booster. A high-back booster provides a physical reminder for a younger child of where he or she must sit to stay safe.

A high-back booster may offer additional side-impact protection in the event of a crash. Side-impact testing is not a requirement in Canada and so we don't know how a high-back might perform over a backless seat in this way.

What should I look for in a booster seat?

The key to making sure that you are using a booster seat safely is fit! The lap belt should fit snug on the child's hips, touch the thighs and should not ride up on the belly. The shoulder belt should lay flat across the chest and collarbone and rest halfway between the child's neck and shoulder.

Is an expensive booster seat better than a less expensive seat?

All seats sold in Canada have passed Canadian testing and are safe when used as directed.

What is the best booster seat to buy?

The best booster seat is the one that fits your child, your car and your budget and that you use correctly on every ride. The key to making sure that you are using a booster seat safely is correct belt fit. Your child will be using a booster seat for 5-7 years, so it's important to look for a seat that fits your child now that will adjust to fit him or her for a long time.

What can you do to get a better fit?

If the seat belt doesn't fit correctly when you are using a booster seat, there are steps you can take:

- First, read the instruction manual to ensure that you are using it correctly as directed.
- If the armrests adjust, try raising or lowering them
- On a high-back booster, try raising or lowering the back or headrest.
- On a backless booster, if there is a guide for the shoulder belt, try using it.
- Check the vehicle manual to see if you may recline the vehicle seat slightly to improve the fit.
- Try using another seating position in the car.
- Try a different booster seat. This one may not be a good fit for your car or your child.

Why do some booster seats attach to the UAS (lower anchors)?

In a booster seat, the seat belt is holding the child and the booster seat in the car. Some seats permit you to attach the booster seat to the vehicle using the UAS anchors. This feature will hold the booster seat in place when the child is not using it so that in a crash the seat will not become a projectile and injure other passengers. If your booster seat does not allow this feature – you can teach your child to buckle the booster seat before he or she gets out of the car to keep others safe.

What about the front seat?

Can I use a booster seat in the front passenger seat?

Children under 13 should be in the backseat. Front seat airbags are dangerous for children. The back seat is safer even in vehicles without a front seat airbag.

What about weight sensitive airbags?

Weight sensitive airbags are a great safety feature that reduces the risk that an airbag will go off in a crash when a child is in the vehicle seat. However, the airbag can still deploy. It is just less likely to deploy. It is safer to keep children in the back seat.

Vehicle manufacturers put a warning on their front passenger visor stating that children who are twelve years old or less should ride in the backseat.

Is there a way to reduce the risk of the airbag?

You can reduce the risk by sliding the front seat as far back as possible from the dash and the airbag. Make sure that the child is sitting correctly and doesn't move out of position to bend down or put his or her feet on the dash.

The driver, together with the parents, is ultimately responsible for this decision and must decide which risks he or she feels comfortable taking.

If you must transport a child under 13 in the front seat and can disable the airbag with a key or switch, you should do so. Remember to reactivate the airbag for an adult passenger.

What does the law say about using a booster seat in the front passenger seat?

The law in most provinces does not specifically address the use of booster seats in the front seat; however, the law does state that the seat must be used correctly according to the directions. The booster seat instructions will state that the booster must not be used in front of an active airbag.

When can my child use the adult seat belt without a booster seat?

When can my child safely use the adult seat belt?

Most kids don't fit the adult seat belt safely until 10-12 years old.

Your child is ready to use the seat belt without a booster seat when they meet all 5 steps:

- The child is at least 145 cm (4 feet 9 inches) tall.
- The child's knees bend comfortably over the edge of the seat while the child is sitting up straight with his or her back against the vehicle seat
- The lap belt stays low and fits snug across the hip bones.
- The shoulder belt crosses the collarbone and stays between the neck and shoulder.
- The child can sit like this for the entire trip without slouching.

If your child does not yet fit the seat belt in this way, he or she still needs to use a booster seat to be safe.

What is the law about using a booster seat?

Remember that your child should still continue to use a booster seat until he or she can pass the 5-step test above.

Here are the booster seat laws for the Maritimes:

Booster Seat Laws in the Maritimes	
Nova Scotia	Minimum of 18 kg (40 pounds) before a child can move to a booster seat. The child stays in the booster seat until he or she meets ONE of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 9 years old OR 145 cm (4 feet 9 inches)
New Brunswick	Minimum of 18 kg (40 pounds) before a child can move to a booster seat. The child stays in the booster seat until he or she meets ONE of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 9 years old OR 145 cm (4 feet 9 inches) OR 36 kg (80 pounds)
PEI	Minimum of 18 kg (40 pounds) before a child can move to a booster seat. The child stays in the booster seat until he or she meets ONE of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 10 years old OR 145 cm (4 feet 9 inches)
Newfoundland & Labrador	Minimum of 18 kg (40 pounds) before a child can move to a booster seat. The child stays in the booster seat until he or she meets the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 9 years old OR 145 cm (4 feet 9 inches) AND 37 kg (81.5 pounds)

Where can I get more information?

If you have a question about booster seat safety, please contact Child Safety link at childsafetylink@iwk.nshealth.ca or call 1-866-288-1388 extension 1 (toll-free in Atlantic Canada) or 902-470-7036.

Please visit us at www.childsafetylink.ca for more information on booster seat safety and other child safety topics.