

Child restraints

Factsheet

07

November
2013

ISSN 1172-0689 (print)
ISSN 1172-0778 (online)

If you're transporting children in a vehicle on our roads you need to know how to safely restrain them so that they're protected in the event of a crash.

Your responsibilities as the driver (under the law)

As the driver, you must make sure that any child **under 7 years** of age is properly restrained by an approved child restraint that is appropriate for the age and size of the child. They must not travel in the vehicle if you can't put them in an approved child restraint. The vehicle's safety belt on its own is not an approved child restraint.

Approved child restraints include:

- infant restraints for young babies (often called **baby capsules**)
- restraints for older babies, toddlers and preschool children (often called **car seats**)
- **booster seats for preschool and school-aged children**
- **child safety harnesses (used with or without a booster seat)** for preschool and school-aged children.

All approved child restraints display **Standards Markings** (please see below for details).

If the child is aged **7 years** you must use an approved child restraint if one is available in the vehicle and if it is appropriate for the child's age and size. Otherwise they must use a safety belt if one is available. If no child restraints or safety belts are available, they must travel in the back seat.

Children aged **8 to 14 years** must use a safety belt if one is available. Otherwise, they must travel in a back seat.

Note: A child under 15 years old may sit beside the driver **only** if they are restrained by a child restraint or safety belt (whichever is appropriate for their age and size). However, they are always safer in a back seat than in the front.

Exceptions to the law

There are occasions when the law does not require a child to be seated in a child restraint.

For more information about exceptions to the law go to www.nzta.govt.nz/resources/factsheets/07/exceptions-to-the-law.html.

Child safety advice

Certified Child Restraint Technicians

Child Restraint Technicians have been trained and certified through a competence-based system linked to the New Zealand Qualifications Framework.

This means they can provide informed advice on the type of child restraint you may need. They also have the practical knowledge to correctly fit your child restraint into a vehicle and show you how to do it too.

Child restraint technicians come from a variety of organisations such as retailers, car rental companies, hospitals and charities.

A list of certified Child Restraint Technicians is available here: www.nzta.govt.nz/traffic/students-parents/child-restraints-technician-list.html

Where you can get a child restraint

Child restraints are sold in shops that specialise in baby supplies, department stores and larger toy shops. You can rent child restraints from the Plunket Society, other community groups and some companies.

The cost of renting child restraints can vary. Sometimes Work and Income New Zealand can provide financial assistance.

More information on **renting, buying and installing** child restraints is available from car seat retailers and at Plunket, other hire outlets and child restraint retailers.

What you need to know before you rent or buy a child restraint

It is generally accepted that children under the height of 148cm should be seated in an appropriate child restraint. The specific type of child restraint you need to use depends on the **age** and **size** of the child. It is recommended that children are seated in rear-facing child restraints for as long as possible, due to the increase in safety these restraints provide. Suggested guidelines for what child restraint to use are given below, but there are a range of different restraints on the market that may be suitable for you and your child. Refer to the manufacturer's instructions to find a child restraint that best fits your child.

- Infant restraint: birth up to 1 year of age.
- Convertible (baby to child) restraint: birth to approximately 4 to 5 years of age.
- Front-facing child restraint: about 1 year to approximately 4 years of age.
- Booster seat: from approximately 4 to 10 years of age.
- Child safety harness: from approximately 4 to 10 years of age.

The restraint's instruction manual will explain how to tell when a child has outgrown it. When your child outgrows their restraint, it's time to move them into a model of restraint that is suitable for a larger child.

Please note:

- It is strongly recommended that you try the restraint you are looking to buy or hire in your vehicle and your child in the restraint. Some restraints fit the shape of some vehicle seats and safety belts better than others. Make sure you can return the restraint if it does not fit into your vehicle seats properly.
- Rear-facing is the safest position for babies and infants and many child restraints now allow for this.
- Child restraint and medical professionals recommend that you keep your baby in a **rear-facing restraint** until as old as practicable, at least until they are 2 years of age.

How to attach a child restraint so it is safe

When securing a child restraint in a vehicle, **always** follow the child restraint manufacturer's instructions. Also check the vehicle instruction manual. This will ensure the child restraint is safely installed.

Children should always be seated in the rear seat of a vehicle, as it is safer. This is true regardless of the child's age, size or type of child restraint used.

Different types of child restraints require different types of car safety belts to hold them securely. Most child restraints require a three-point safety belt and tether strap. Some child restraints for babies and younger children can be secured using a lap belt in the back middle seat. Others can be secured with fixtures in the car (such as ISOFIX and LATCH systems).

Harnesses require a lap belt and tether strap, while other child restraints use the three-point safety belt with or without a tether strap.

Booster seats **must** be used in conjunction with a three-point safety belt or in combination with a separate child safety harness.

What to do if you don't have seats or safety belts in the back of your van or car

If you do not have child restraints or safety belts fitted in the back seats of your van or car, you are not permitted to transport children under the age of 7 in your vehicle. If you need to get seats or safety belts fitted, ask an agent of the NZ Transport Agency for advice about what is best for your vehicle.

Children are always safer seated in a back seat than in the front. A child under 15 years old may sit beside the driver only if seated securely in an appropriate child restraint or correctly restrained by a safety belt (whichever is appropriate for their age and size).

What if my car has airbags?

- **Never** put a child in a rear-facing child restraint into the front seat of a car that has a passenger airbag. If the airbag is activated the child could be seriously injured or killed.
- All child restraints, including forward-facing restraints, are best installed in the rear passenger seat.

If you must use a forward-facing child restraint in the front passenger seat (eg because there are no rear seats), please refer to manufacturer's instructions for both the vehicle and the restraint. The instructions will tell you whether your child restraint can be correctly fitted in the front seat of that vehicle (eg it has the required anchor point for the tether strap).

If the vehicle manufacturer's instructions state a child restraint can be safely installed in the front passenger seat, it is

recommended you move the seat back as far as it can go.

When using a booster seat check the diagonal part of the safety belt (the sash) is away from the child's neck and crosses the child's shoulder and chest bone. You may need to adjust the vehicle seat until it fits correctly.

Ask for advice from a certified Child Restraint Technician.

You may be able to switch the front passenger airbag off in your vehicle if you have a child restraint in the front seat. Remember to switch it on again when the child restraint is no longer in the front seat.

Tether straps

Most child restraints used in New Zealand have upper **tether straps**. This means that they still use the vehicle's safety belts, and also have a strap that must be clipped onto an **anchor point** in the vehicle. Anchor points are usually on the rear parcel tray, or, in the case of station wagons, on the floor behind the rear seats, but they may also be in other positions.

Check the vehicle manufacturer's manual for the tether anchor point locations.

If you cannot find an anchor point in your vehicle, there are 2 options:

1. **Install an anchor point.** You can buy one from most places that sell child restraints and baby supplies. A competent car mechanic or main dealer for your car's make should be able to install the anchor point for you so it is safely secured into the correct place on your vehicle.
2. Find and use a model of child restraint that is designed to work without being secured by an upper tether strap.

What age/stage is safe for a child to wear an adult safety belt?

Safety belts are designed for adult bodies. You should use an approved child restraint until they are tall enough for an adult safety belt to fit correctly.

This is generally accepted as when the child is taller than 148cm and when:

- the child is able to sit upright against the back of the seat with their knees comfortably bent over the edge of the seat cushion
- the diagonal part of the safety belt crosses the child's shoulder and breast bone, not the neck
- the lap part of the safety belt crosses low down on the child's lap, touching their thighs, and is not up around their stomach.

Important safety note: Safety belts are designed to hold 1 person.

- **Never** put a safety belt around 2 or more children, and
- **Never** put a child on an adult's lap with the belt around them both.

Standards markings on child restraints

A child restraint must meet an approved standard. This means that the design and the construction of the child restraint is laboratory tested under crash conditions. If a child restraint meets a standard you will find that it displays 1 of the following markings over the page.

Child restraints certified for use in New Zealand will show the Standards Mark of the Joint New Zealand/Australian Standard (AS/NZ1754), OR an 'E' mark (European Standard ECE 44). The number in the circle varies depending upon the country of manufacture.



A restraint that complies with the United States Standard (FMVSS 213) must, in addition to any other markings, display the New Zealand Standard 'S' mark, to show they have been certified for use in New Zealand.



For further information regarding approved standards for child restraints, please contact the Transport Agency on 0800 699 000.

In-built child restraints

Some imported Japanese vehicles have in-built child restraints in the rear seats. If you have one of these child restraints in your vehicle and the vehicle was entry-certified after 27 February 2005, the child restraint will have been checked and will be safe to use. If the vehicle was first registered in New Zealand before 27 February 2005, you should get the child restraint checked by an agent of the Transport Agency to make sure it is safe.

Second-hand child restraints

Always, before you buy a second-hand child restraint:

- **Ask a certified Child Restraint Technician to check the seat for you.** This is the safest option.
- **Check the restraint for its date of manufacture and/or expiry.** A child restraint can only be used in New Zealand if it is within its expiry date. If no 'expiry' or 'do not use after' date can be found on the seat, and it is more than 10 years old you should not buy it or use it.
- **Check the restraint for its Standard Mark.** A child restraint may only be used in New Zealand if it displays one of the approved Standards Marks.
- **Ask for the User Manual that goes with the restraint.** If no manual is offered with the restraint, check online or contact the manufacturer for information about the model before you purchase.
- **Make sure all parts of the restraint are in good order.** Confirm the restraint has never been in a vehicle crash of any type. Restraints involved in any type of crash should be discarded.

The information in this factsheet is a general guide only. It is not the source of the law and should not be used in place of authoritative legal documents. Some factsheets are updated frequently and print versions can quickly become out of date. If the currency of the information you are reading is important, check the factsheet index on our website (www.nzta.govt.nz/factsheets) or call us on 0800 699 000.

Remove all covers and padding to check the frame is free of any marks or discoloured plastic that might indicate the frame has been under stress or might be weakened. Check all straps and buckles to ensure they function correctly.

- **Check the restraint will be suitable for your child and will fit into your vehicle.**

What to look out for when you buy a vehicle

If you're buying a vehicle, buy one with enough seats, anchor points and three-point lap-shoulder safety belts for your whole family. Avoid vehicles with lap belts if possible. Check www.rightcar.govt.nz for information on vehicle safety ratings and features.

Where can you find out more?

- The NZ Transport Agency is a Crown agency responsible for contributing to an effective, efficient and safe land transport system. This involves the planning and funding of land transport. It involves the enforcement of laws, regulations and rules, and the collection of revenue. It also involves ensuring New Zealanders have access to land transport, including through building, operating and maintaining land transport systems. This is work we undertake with a number of partners. You can find out more information on the Transport Agency website <http://nzta.govt.nz/>. You can also access a list of certified Child Restraint Technicians at www.nzta.govt.nz/traffic/students-parents/child-restraints-technician-list.html. You can also contact us on 0800 699 000, email info@nzta.govt.nz or write to: NZ Transport Agency, Private Bag 6995, Wellington 6141.
- Plunket Society is a national not-for-profit organisation. It is a community-owned and governed provider of support services for the development, health and wellbeing of children under the age of 5. You can contact PlunketLine on 0800 933 922 or visit the Plunket website <http://www.plunket.org.nz/>.
- Safekids New Zealand is the national injury prevention service of Starship Children's Health. Safekids works to raise public awareness of child injury issues and advocates for the adoption of policies and strategies that will improve child safety. Visit www.safekids.org.nz.
- Agents of the Transport Agency include:
 - Automobile Association (AA),
phone +64 9 966 8800,
free phone 0800 500 333,
fax +64 9 966 8893,
email aatech@aa.co.nz
 - Vehicle Inspection New Zealand (VINZ),
phone +64 9 580 3170,
fax +64 9 525 8910,
email info@vinz.co.nz
 - Vehicle Testing New Zealand (VTNZ),
phone +64 4 495 2500,
fax +64 4 495 2530,
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Contact details

- Call our contact centre: 0800 699 000.
- Visit our website: www.nzta.govt.nz.
- Email us: info@nzta.govt.nz.
- Write to us: NZ Transport Agency, Private Bag 11777, Palmerston North 4442.