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PARENTS/CAREGIVERS REPORT 21 PERCENT OF CHILDREN AGES 4 THROUGH 8 USING BOOSTER SEATS

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) conducts a national telephone survey approximately every two years to monitor the public's attitudes, knowledge, and self-reported behavior regarding safety belts, child safety seats, air bags, crash injury experience, and emergency medical services (EMS). The 2003 survey consisted of two questionnaires, each administered to a randomly selected sample of about 6,000 persons age 16 and older. Interviewing ran from January 8, 2003 to March 30, 2003. Volume 5 presents findings on child occupant protection.

Seating Position of Children Age 12 and Younger

- Among drivers who lived with one or more children age 12 or younger, most indicated that the youngest child typically rode in the back seat when riding with them, with 63% saying the child never rode in the front seat in the past 30 days and 12% claiming it occurred just a few times.
- Children were more likely to sit in the front seat if the child was older, if there was no frontal passenger air bag in the respondent's primary vehicle, and if the respondent lived in a rural area.

Transporters of Children Under Age 9

- About half (51%) of all drivers had driven a motor vehicle in the past year with a child under the age of 9 as a passenger, but more than half of these drivers did not actually live with a child in that age range.
- Most often, the driver transporting a child not living in the household was a grandparent (43%).

Parents/Caregivers of Children Under Age 9

The survey asked a detailed set of questions to parents or other caregivers of children under age 9 (see report for sample definition).

- When asked the frequency the subject child under age 9 uses a car seat (including booster seats), 60% of drivers said "all the time" and 32% said "never." The remainder either gave a frequency that was less than all the time (6%), said they never drove the child (1%), or were unsure or refused to respond (< 0.5%). A small percentage of those who said the child uses a car seat subsequently reversed their response.
- Children who did not use car seats were usually reported to be using safety belts; 95% of them "all the time" and 3% "most of the time."

Children Under Age 9 Who Used Car Seats

- Most infants (72%) rode rear facing in their car seats, although 20% were reported to be riding in a front facing position and a few were possibly using booster seats. Front facing child safety seats predominated among children ages 1 through 4. Booster seats accounted for 13% of car seat users among 3-year-olds then nearly tripled to 35% at age 4. After age 4, booster seats became the predominant child restraint used, though only a minority of children used a child restraint of any type after age 5.
- Ninety-four percent of the parents/caregivers usually had the child ride in the back seat when riding in a car seat. Almost all of the parents/caregivers (99%) knew that the back seat was the safest location to place a child car seat. Most (92%) agreed it was unsafe to place a rear facing car seat in the front seat of a vehicle having a passenger air bag.
- More than three-fifths (62%) of the parents/caregivers considered it very easy to attach the car seat to the vehicle. Most often, respondents said they learned how to attach the child car seat to the vehicle by reading the instructions (71%).
- Slightly more than one-quarter of the parents/caregivers (27%) of children who used car seats had heard of LATCH. A few others were aware there had been a change in the way car seats are designed to attach to vehicles, but were unfamiliar with the term LATCH. About one-quarter (26%) of those who had heard of LATCH said they had used the LATCH system. A few expressed difficulties attaching LATCH car seats to the motor vehicle.

- Slightly more than one-half (53%) of parents/guardians of children using front facing toddler seats reported that the seat had an upper tether, with 62% of them saying they used the tether on all trips. Respondents who did not use the tether on all trips most often indicated it was because there was no place in the vehicle to attach it (50%).
- More than one-in-five (22%) of the parents/caregivers had gone to an inspection station to have a technician check if they were installing their child's car seat correctly. Most found out about the station either from someone they knew (28%) or else through the major media: local paper (16%), television (10%), radio (9%). Twenty-one percent of those who went to a station indicated the technician found something wrong with how they attached the seat or buckled in their child. The percentage increased to 36% when the survey asked parents/caregivers if the technician suggested they do something differently in how they attach the seat.

bar graph - click [d] for long description[d]

Qx. How did you find out about the car seat check you went to?

Base: Said they had gone to an inspection station to have someone check how they were attaching the car seat.

Unweighted N=205

**Total exceeds 100% due to multiple responses*

- If the child did not use the child restraint on every single trip, the reasons most often given for non-use were that they would only be in the vehicle a short time (50%), the seat was unavailable (41%) and the child did not like the seat (34%).

Booster Seat Issues

Parents/caregivers of children under age 9, including children who weren't using child restraints, were asked a series of questions about booster seats.

- Based on the survey's operational definition of booster seats, 21% of children ages 4 through 8 at least on occasion rode in a booster seat, and another 19% at least on occasion rode in front facing child safety seats.
- Most parents/caregivers (85%) had heard of booster seats, and 60% of those who were aware of booster seats also said they had used them at some time with their child(ren). About two-in-five (39%) of those who had used booster seats said they had started using the booster with their child(ren) before age 4.
- Among the parents/caregivers who had seen or heard of booster seats, 22% had concerns about their safety. These parents/caregivers criticized booster seats as loose fitting and unstable systems that would not adequately restrain the child in a crash.

Support for Enforcement

- The general public (age 16 and older) favored stringent enforcement of car seat laws, as 59% believed the police should issue a ticket at every opportunity. Just as many (59%) believed the fine should be \$50 or more. More than one-third (36%) said the fine should be \$100 or more.

How To Order

For a copy of **2003 Motor Vehicle Occupant Safety Survey (Volume 5: Child Safety Seat Report)** write to the Office of Research and Technology, NHTSA, NHT-130, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington DC 20590 or send a fax to (202) 366-7096 or download www.nhtsa.dot.gov. Alan Block was the contract manager.

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