

## 8 CHILD CAR SEAT MISTAKES

Motor vehicle crashes remain a leading cause of death for children under age 13. In Illinois, one out of four children who die in crashes is unrestrained. Researchers estimate that proper use of federally-approved car seats could reduce child deaths by 71 percent and injuries by 67 percent. National observational data shows car seat usage rate for children under four years old is above 90 percent while booster seat usage rates for children four - seven is approximately 20 percent. Did you know the most common mistakes made when installing a child's car seat can also be the most deadly?

- 1. Turning the child forward-facing too soon;** Children should remain rear-facing as long as the car seat allows, up to the height and weight limits of the car seat. Car seats shells are designed to absorb crash forces. Turning a child forward-facing too soon increases the likelihood of injury to their head, neck and spine.
- 2. Not adjusting the harness snugly against the child;** The harness properly positions the child in a car seat and should be snug to provide the best protection. Harness straps should lay flat against the child (not over heavy clothing) and be snug enough that you cannot pinch excess webbing.
- 3. Not securing the car seat in the vehicle properly;** Seat belts (or the LATCH system) are intended to secure car seats to the vehicle and must be locked in place. Lap and shoulder belts in the back seat typically lock by gently pulling the shoulder webbing all the way out of the retractor to put it in "locked" mode. Excess webbing is pulled tight and recessed into the retractor.
- 4. Forgetting to register the car seat for recall notifications;** Car seats can be recalled by their manufacturer. By registering your car seat, you will be notified if something needs to be replaced or added to the car seat. Not all recalls affect the safety of the car seat, but they can. Make sure to label your car seat with emergency contact information as well.
- 5. Having toys or other items unsecured in the vehicle;** Anything not belted in or strapped down in a vehicle can become a projectile in a crash. Phones, diaper bags, toys and strollers are all potentially dangerous if not secured.
- 6. Not using the lower anchors/LATCH system as approved;** Lower Anchors and Tethers for Children (LATCH) is a vehicle system that can be used to secure the car seat, and is an alternative to the seat belt. Lower Anchors do have weight limits and are often designed to be used only in the outside seating positions, not the center seat. Most LATCH systems are also not designed to be used with a seat belt. Check your car seat and vehicle's owner's manuals before using the LATCH system.
- 7. Not using the top tether on a forward-facing car seat;** The top tether of a car seat should be used for all forward-facing car seat installations, whether using the LATCH system or the seat belt. The top tether or "top strap" keeps the top of the car seat from moving too far forward in a crash.
- 8. Moving to the next car seat or booster seat too soon;** With every seat graduation, children lose a level of protection. The booster seat helps an adult seat belt fit a child. Children should outgrow the height and weight limits of their forward-facing harness car seat before graduating to a booster seat. Children are ready for the seat belt once they are 4'9" and can sit correctly with the lap belt crossing their hips and the shoulder belt crossing their chest.