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WisDOT: Put children's safety first on every trip in a vehicle

Posted on Tuesday, Sep 6, 2022

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Crashes are a leading cause of death for children across the U.S. On average, about 2,000 children 12 and under are hurt in crashes in Wisconsin every year.

Properly securing a child in a car seat is a critical step to keep kids safe in a vehicle and it's required by law. When a car seat is installed and used correctly, it can reduce the risk of death in a crash by as much as 71%.

"We want to make sure that our most precious resources, our children, are as safe as possible every time they get in a vehicle," Wisconsin State Patrol Superintendent Tim Carnahan said. "That's why it's so important to use the right car seat for your child's size and to make sure it's installed correctly."

Know the laws

Wisconsin State Patrol's September Law of the Month is Child Passenger Safety, to help families better understand the rules surrounding child seat safety.

According to Wisconsin state law, children must ride in a:

· Rear-facing car seat until they are one year old and weigh 20 pounds

· Forward-facing car seat with a harness until they are four years old and weigh 40 pounds

· Booster seat until they are eight years old, weigh 80 pounds, or are 4'9" tall

More car seat safety recommendations for various ages and sizes are available online.

Seat belt use for all ages

After children outgrow a booster seat, they need to wear a seat belt, just like adults in Wisconsin.

Seat belt use is not only required by law, it's also one of the greatest protections for a driver or passenger in case of a crash.

"Our children and young people are watching adults all the time and they model our behavior," Superintendent Carnahan said. "When children see adults buckle up, it's more natural for them to do the same. You want to be in a position where the kids buckle up first and then they're bugging mom and dad to quickly buckle up, even if the vehicle hasn't started in motion. That's what we want to see."

WisDOT encourages people of all ages to promise to protect themselves and others on the roads by always wearing a seat belt and taking the Buckle Up Phone Down pledge.

Safety on the school bus

This fall, children will be getting back on buses for the first time since last school year. School buses are designed to be the safest vehicles on the roads, with special features that make them safer than cars to prevent crashes and injuries.

Students are 70 times more likely to get to school safely in a bus than a car, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, but their greatest risk is when getting on or off the bus.

When riding the bus, children should:

- Stay five steps away from the curb while waiting for the bus to arrive
- Follow all instructions from crossing guards
- Wait until the bus driver signals it's safe to get onto the bus or cross in front of it
- Sit facing forward after finding a seat

The Wisconsin State Patrol inspects every Wisconsin school bus annually to make

sure they're safe, conducting about 12,000 inspections each year. Inspectors look at mechanical equipment like steering, brakes and exits, first aid kits and fire extinguishers.

Free resources

Child Passenger Safety Week is September 18-24, 2022. The Wisconsin Department of Transportation encourages all families to take this time to make sure your child is prepared to stay safe in a vehicle.

National Seat Check Saturday is September 24. Certified Child Passenger Safety technicians will be available in communities across Wisconsin to demonstrate how to use car seats, booster seats and seat belts correctly.

Additional resources are available for parents on the Safe Kids Wisconsin and NHTSA websites, including frequently asked questions, car seat tips and videos.

View the Wisconsin State Patrol Law of the Month online at: https://wisconsindot.gov/Pages/about-wisdot/newsroom/law/lom.aspx