



KANSAS

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New Kansas booster seat law goes into effect July 1

Measure will enhance safety of children

A major change in Kansas' occupant protection law goes into effect July 1, 2006, when motorists will be required to secure children ages 4 through 7 in a booster seat, unless the child weighs more than 80 pounds or is taller than 4 feet 9 inches.

The new booster seat law was passed during the recently-completed legislative session and signed by Gov. Kathleen Sebelius. It is designed to enhance the safety of young passengers.

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for children in the 4 through 7 age range, and booster seats used properly with safety belts have been proven more effective than safety belts alone at reducing the risk of injury to children involved in a crash.

A study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association in June 2003 concluded that children ages 4 through 7 using booster seats were 59 percent *less* likely to be injured in a crash than children who were restrained only by an adult safety belt.

Standard safety belt systems are designed for restraining occupants taller than 4 feet 9 inches and therefore don't fit children correctly. Thus, when a crash occurs, a child tends to slide under the lap portion of the belt, moving it up the child's stomach, which can cause severe internal injuries. A similar danger exists with the shoulder portion of the belt, which, on a shorter child, will ride up against the child's neck and can lead to serious injury.

Two kinds of booster seats – no-back and high-back – are available. No-back booster seats, which usually are priced starting at around \$15, should only be used in vehicles with built in head restraints. High-back booster seats range in price from \$40 to \$100.

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“That’s a small price to pay for a child’s safety,” said Pete Bodyk, chief of the Bureau of Traffic Safety of the Kansas Department of Transportation. “Every child needs to be in a booster seat until the seat belt fits right.”

When securing children in a booster seat, drivers should make sure the shoulder belt is snug across the chest and rests flat across the center of the collarbone. The shoulder belt should never be placed behind a child’s back or under the arm. For additional information on how to properly secure children in booster seats, visit www.kansasboosterseat.org.

Although the law goes into effect on July 1, 2006, the warning provision only applies to the booster seat and will be in effect for the first year. During the first year, law enforcement officers will issue warnings for violations of the booster seat law, but may issue a \$60 (plus court costs) citation for any child unrestrained under the age of 4 and for those 8 years to 14 years. After July 1, 2007, law enforcement officers may issue the same fine for all ages covered under the act, including booster-aged children.

“The Legislature built in, and law enforcement supported, the one-year grace period to allow time to educate Kansans about the new booster belt law,” said Col. William Seck, superintendent of the Kansas Highway Patrol. “Part of that educational mission will be issuing warnings, and we intend to be very aggressive in that regard, just as we are on all provisions of Kansas’ child passenger safety laws.”

Kansas law requires that:

- Children be secured in an appropriate child passenger safety restraint.
- Children under 1 year old and 20 pounds must ride in a rear-facing child seat.
- Children 1, 2 and 3 must be properly restrained in a forward-facing child seat.
- Children 4, 5, 6 and 7 must ride in a booster seat unless the child weighs more than 80 pounds or the child is taller than 4 feet 9 inches.
- Children ages 8 through 13 must be protected by a safety belt.

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