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Travel “The Road to Safety” by Using the Right Car Seat September 18-24 is Child Passenger Safety Week

Mechanicsburg, Pa. – Every year, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) partners with local communities to hold Child Passenger Safety Week, which runs this year from September 18-24. The annual safety week ends with National Seat Check Saturday, a day for parents and caregivers to receive free instruction on how to correctly install and use the right car seats for their kids. Car seat check events hosted by certified technicians provide hands-on guidance on the correct selection, installation and use of the appropriate car seat, booster seat, or seat belt based on a child’s age, weight, height, and developmental needs.

Car crashes are a leading cause of death for children. Sadly, two children under 13 were killed every day in 2020 while riding in vehicles, and another 278 were injured. The latest research from NHTSA shows that at least 46% of car seats are misused, or not installed correctly. More than a third of children 12 and younger who died in crashes in 2020 in cars, pickups, vans, and SUVs were unbuckled or unrestrained.

“Most parents think their kids are in the right seats and that the seats are installed the right way,” said Jessica Ritter, Safe Kids Pennsylvania (SKPA) State Office Coordinator, “but the reality is that nearly half of car seats are installed incorrectly, leaving kids vulnerable to injury in a crash. National Seat Check Saturday is an opportunity for parents to make sure their children are safe in their car seats and booster seats.” Ritter added that using age- and size-appropriate car seats and installing them correctly are the best ways to reduce crash fatalities among children.

One of the most common mistakes parents and caregivers make with car seats is moving their children to the next seat or position too soon. SKPA has some tips to keep your kids safe when riding in cars, and these recommendations are based on decades of research that have shown the safest way for children to ride in vehicles:

- **Keep young children rear-facing as long as possible**, up to the top height and weight allowed by their particular seats. In Pennsylvania, the law specifies until 2 years old, but we recommend going by the top weight/height of the car seat being used.
- Once a child outgrows a rear-facing car seat, they are ready to travel in a **forward-facing car seat with a harness and tether**. The tether is 100% essential for installing a forward-facing car seat; it keeps the seat from moving forward in a crash.
- After outgrowing the forward-facing car seat, a child should be **buckled in a booster seat until tall enough to fit in an adult seat belt properly**. Children might ask to ditch the booster seat because it makes them feel older to ride without it, but the truth is: their safety is what matters most. In Pennsylvania, the law specifies until 8 years old, but we encourage the use of booster seats until a seat belt alone fits the child properly.

- Once your child is ready to use a seat belt, ensure that it fits correctly, and remember that **the safest place for all kids under 13 is buckled up in the back seat.**

“Don’t wait for a crash to happen to find out if your child’s seat is installed correctly. At that point, it’s too late to check,” Ritter said. “Let an expert check for you so you can have that peace of mind.”

Seat Check Saturday is on September 24 this year, and many communities have car seat checks regularly throughout the year. While the COVID-19 pandemic may affect the in-person availability of certified Child Passenger Safety Technicians, virtual appointments may also be available in your community. At these free appointments, certified CPSTs explain how to use car seats, booster seats, and seat belts correctly. The technicians help educate consumers on choosing the correct car seat, installing that seat correctly, and using that seat correctly every time.

To find car seat check events in your community, visit www.pakidstravelsafe.org or call 1-800-CAR-BELT. For tips on car seat usage, installation, and the right fit, use the Ultimate Car Seat Guide, available in English and Spanish through Safe Kids Worldwide, at <https://ucsg.safekids.org/>. You can also visit <https://www.nhtsa.gov/equipment/car-seats-and-booster-seats>, NHTSA’s parent resource page, for information on making sure you are using the correct car seat for your child’s age and size.

If you are in PA and unable to afford a car seat, call 1-800-CAR-BELT or visit www.pakidstravelsafe.org to find the nearest car seat loan program. We recommend searching by county and calling the location to set up an appointment and review any requirements for the program.

If you would like more information about different safety topics, call 717-766-1616 or visit www.pasafekids.org.

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Safe Kids Pennsylvania (SKPA) is part of Safe Kids Worldwide’s global network dedicated to keeping kids safe from preventable childhood injury, which is the number one cause of death among children ages 1 to 19. These injuries range from accidental falls, to poisonings, car crashes, drownings, and many more. SKPA promotes and supports childhood injury prevention activities through education, collaboration, and advocacy throughout Pennsylvania. Safe Kids Pennsylvania is one of many statewide coalitions under Safe Kids Worldwide, and is led by the American Trauma Society, PA Division. For more information on Safe Kids PA, visit our website at <https://www.pasafekids.org/> or on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/safekidspa/>.