ESSENTIAL INFORMATION
May 2015

Child Car Safety Seat Laws
Prepared by the Policy Surveillance Program Staff

SUMMARY

Vehicular crashes continue to be the number one cause of accidental death among U.S. children less than 12 years old. Child safety seats protect children as they are transported in automobiles. Child safety seats are regulated at the state level based on a variety of factors. States generally provide specific guidance for when a child can graduate between different types of child safety seats, which include forward-facing, rear-facing, or any type of car seat, booster seats and seat belts. This map organizes requirements first by age, and then by the type of device. It also includes information on when a seat belt alone is allowed, and the monetary fines associated with violations of these child restraint laws.

ABOUT CHILD CAR SAFETY SEAT LAWS & THE DATA

Although many drivers use child car safety seats for their young passengers, improper use or installation still leaves many children vulnerable to injuries or death. Manufacturers have developed a variety of devices for drivers to use depending upon a child’s size or age, and state laws and regulations govern which devices may be used based primarily upon these two characteristics.

The laws that outline the legal requirements for which restraints are to be used are found in the statutes and regulations of every state and the District of Columbia.

State legislatures authorize which child safety restraints a driver can use. Although not acting as the primary authority, various state boards, such as a state Board of Transportation or Board of Motor Vehicles, also outline regulations that build upon or interpret the states’ legislative statutes. States generally provide specific guidance for when a child can graduate between different types of child restraint systems, which include forward-facing, rear-facing, or any type of car seat, booster seats and seat belts.

Although states are able to define child restraint systems, many states follow the Federal Regulations definitions. Below are the general device descriptions, as summarized from the Code of Federal Regulations, 49 CFR 571.213:

- Child restraint device – A device, except for seat belts, to restrain, seat, or position children who weigh 30 kilograms or less.
- Front-facing seat – A device, except for seat belts, which restrain or position children facing the normal direction of travel.
- Rear-facing seat – A device, except for seat belts, which restrain or position children facing the opposite direction of travel.
• Booster seat – A device which raises the child to a safe position at which seat belt use would be appropriate.

NAVIGATING THE DATA

There are two ways to navigate the data by clicking the **Filter** tab or the **Explore** tab — for each option, the data can be visualized in a map and table format or in jurisdiction profiles.

**Filter**
The dataset homepage will default to the Filter tab. Here, users may answer a series of questions to learn more about the characteristics of the laws. Answering more than one question will show all the jurisdictions that meet the combined criteria. Criteria selected will be listed above the questions, and can be removed by clicking the white X or by clicking “Reset” above the questions.

**Explore**
Users can access Explore by clicking the Explore tab in the bar above the questions. Using Explore, users will see the answers to one question across all jurisdictions.

The primary questions in this dataset are:

1. What child restraint system(s) is/are required for children less than one year old?
2. What child restraint system(s) is/are required for a one year old child?
3. What child restraint system(s) is/are required for a two year old child?
4. What child restraint system(s) is/are required for a three year old child?
5. What child restraint system(s) is/are required for a four year old child?
6. What child restraint system(s) is/are required for a five year old child?
7. What child restraint system(s) is/are required for a six year old child?
8. What child restraint system(s) is/are required for a seven year old child?
9. What child restraint system(s) is/are required for an eight year old child?
10. Are there fines for a driver for a violation of this law?

DISPLAYING THE RESULTS

There are two display modes once criteria have been selected by using either the Filter or Explore tab — **Map** display mode and **Profiles** display mode.

**Map Display**
LawAtlas.org dataset homepages default to the map display mode. When querying the data using the Filter tab, all jurisdictions that meet the criteria selected will display in one tone of yellow. Those jurisdictions that do not meet the criteria selected will be colored gray. When querying the data using the Explore tab, the map will illuminate with colors from yellow to red that are associated with the various answer choices (the color-coding is defined by the key to the left of the map).

Below the map, a table will appear. Using the Filter or Explore tab to navigate the questions will change the display:
- Using the Filter tab, you can select an unlimited number of criteria and the applicable jurisdictions that meet the combined criteria will be displayed in the table below.
- Using the Explore tab, you can isolate a single criterion and the applicable jurisdictions will appear in the table below.

**Profiles Display**
The Profiles display presents the results of the criteria selected in a text-based format for each applicable jurisdiction. Using the Filter tab, jurisdictions that meet the criteria selected will display. Using the Explore tab, jurisdictions that meet the criterion selected will display. If no criteria are selected, the full profiles for each state will appear under both Filter and Explore.

**Profile Legend**
Within each Profile box, above the questions and answers, there are additional options and information useful in exploring the law:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Icon</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>§§</td>
<td><strong>Toggle Legal Text</strong> – Selecting this option will show all the legal text used to answer questions for this jurisdiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Toggle Full Place Profile</strong> – Selecting this option will show all questions and answers for this jurisdiction, regardless of what was selected using the Filter or Explore tabs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Toggle Size</strong> – Selecting this option will make the profile larger, but will not change the information displayed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Legal Text History** – This interactive timeline displays when changes in the law have occurred within a jurisdiction. Using the arrows to the left or right, users may explore how the law has changed over time as new amendments to the law have been enacted. The timeline will change from gray to a shade of yellow when the jurisdiction passed its first relevant law. Each change in the law after that is marked by a break in the timeline.

- ![Timeline Example](image)

**Map and Profile Legend**
There are a few symbols to be aware of in both Map and Profiles display modes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Icon</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>§</td>
<td><strong>Section Symbol</strong> – Clicking this symbol will open a window that displays excerpts from the law that correspond to the question and answer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>⚠️</td>
<td><strong>Caution Note</strong> – Clicking on this symbol will open a small window that displays text that describes important caveats about the question and answer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DATASET RESOURCES
Each dataset homepage includes the following resources available for download:

- **Data**: The Data file exports in CSV. format and may contain two tabs. The “Statistical Data” tab contains the legal variables coded in the dataset, displayed as values defined in the accompanying Codebook. The “Summary Data” tab contains the legal variables coded in the dataset in text form, as well as the accompanying citations and any caution notes that may be included. Note: if there is only one tab available for download it will be the “Statistical Data” as described above.

- **Codebook**: The Codebook defines all of the coded variables in the dataset. The Codebook lists the question, question type, variable name, variable value and variable label. The Codebook should be used in conjunction with the Statistical Data extract.

- **Research Protocol**: The Research Protocol is a comprehensive document that outlines the entire methodology of the project, including the scope, inclusion and exclusion criteria, data collection methods, definitions, coding scheme decisions, as well as the quality control process.

- **Summary Report**: The Summary Report provides a snapshot of important findings from the dataset.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION


This collection of laws does not provide legal advice nor does it address enforcement of laws, administrative policies, case law, or any other sources of law. Should you have a specific question about these laws in your state, please contact an attorney in your jurisdiction.