

Recommended Criteria for Group Purchase of Child Restraints

These criteria apply to institutional models available from major manufacturers.

Basic Guidelines

- Order directly from the manufacturer or from a distributor to get the best prices.
- If it is necessary to go out for bids, choose the product best suited to the needs of the program first; then tailor the request for bids to match.
- Specify that all seats shipped must be recently manufactured and check date stickers when received. Old stock may not meet current safety standards. Also, some child restraint manufacturers stamp an "expiration date" (five to nine years) on their products.
- If needed, make sure instruction booklets are available in Spanish and order them.
- All child restraints manufactured or distributed in the United States must be certified to meet Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard 213.

General recommended features

1. Harness that is adjustable from the front while the seat is installed.
2. Easy-to-remove, machine washable, fabric cover.

Rear-Facing-Only Safety Seats (Rear Facing)

- Minimum weight: none or 3-5 lbs.; maximum weight: 22-35 lbs.
- Not the best choice for most programs serving low-income families, since it usually must be replaced within the first year.
- May be appropriate for specialized programs, such as short-term loans or gifts to new parents by hospitals or for programs for teen parents without personal vehicles or parents of preemies.

Recommended features for rear-facing-only seats

1. Maximum weight at least 30 lbs.
2. Five-point harness with no-thread harness or at least three sets of shoulder strap slots and two crotch strap locations.
3. For programs serving newborns, side-facing car beds should be available for babies who must lie flat. They may be rented or lent to families, since they are usually only needed for a few weeks.*

Convertible Safety Seats (May be used Rear Facing and Forward Facing)

- May be used rear facing (recommended until at least age two) or forward facing.
- Most current models can be used facing rearward up to 35-45 lbs., forward up to 50-80 lbs.
- Best choice for most programs, since they can be adjusted to fit babies, toddlers, and older children.

Recommended features for convertible seats

1. Rear facing up to at least 35 lbs.; forward facing up to at least 50 lbs.
2. Five-point (no shield) harness, no-thread type or at least 4 sets of shoulder strap slots and 2 or 3 crotch strap locations.
3. Pre-installed tether strap with tilt-lock adjuster.

*See #173 at www.carseat.org and American Academy of Pediatrics policy statements at <http://www.aap.org/healthtopics/carseatsafety.cfm>.

Forward-Facing Seats with Harness

- Minimum weight: 20-30 lbs.; maximum weight 40-90 lbs. with harness.
- Not recommended for children under age two.
- Most current models are “combination seats” with a removable harness. Most may be used with harness up to 65 lbs. or more and as booster up to 100 lbs.

Recommended features for forward-facing seats*

1. Harness certified for use up to at least 65 lbs.
2. Higher shoulder strap slots to fit taller children. Ask for measurements and compare.
3. Pre-installed tether strap with tilt-lock adjuster.
4. For combination seats, make sure it works well as booster (lap belt touches thighs; shoulder belt touches chest), especially for children at the lower end of the age/weight scale.

Boosters (Must be Used with Vehicle Lap-Shoulder Belt)

- Minimum weight: 30-40 lbs.; maximum: most 100-125 lbs.
- Not recommended for children under 3-4.

Recommended types*

(Programs should have both types, if possible.)

1. A belt-positioning booster with an adjustable headrest and removable back is the most versatile choice. This type of booster helps keep a sleeping child positioned properly under the vehicle belt and positions the shoulder belt comfortably without preventing it from retracting properly. A backrest is necessary for whiplash protection if the child’s head is not supported by the vehicle seatback or head restraint.
2. Backless boosters are less expensive and easy to carry, which makes them convenient for carpooling and play dates. They work well as long as the child is able to sit upright throughout the trip and the head is supported by the vehicle seatback. Older children may prefer using a backless booster because it is less visible.

*For help in selecting combination seats or boosters, refer to Status Report of December 22, 2009, published by Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (<http://www.iihs.org/externaldata/srdata/docs/sr4411.pdf>).

Refer to #650 for a detailed list of safety seats and harnesses with higher maximum weights and #173 for additional products for children with special needs.

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