

NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

Contact: Stephanie Tombrello, LCSW, CPSTI, Executive Director

SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A., stombrello@carseat.org

800/745-SAFE

Direct line: 626/798-5197

Warning Issued After Child Strangled by Safety Belt

Case highlights need for parents to understand how their safety belts work

(Altadena, September 17, 2020) — An eight-year-old boy from Massachusetts is lucky to be alive after nearly being fatally strangled by a safety belt, leading safety experts to highlight the risks of a little-understood feature of U.S. vehicle belts.

The child became entangled in the safety belt next to him while riding in the family vehicle. The belt, which was connected to the ceiling, locked around the child's neck and pulled him up as he struggled to release himself. He was freed after his mother ran to a nearby hair salon, and a stylist cut him free with scissors. After his mother administered CPR, he was rushed to hospital where he is recovering.

Safety experts are concerned that few understand the danger of entanglement in safety belts. In passenger vehicles made since 1996, all belts except that in the driver's position must be able to be locked so that child safety seats can be installed securely. In most cases, the belt is locked by pulling it all the way out of its housing. Once a belt has been "switched" into the locked mode in this way, it can only be released by being fully returned. Until this is done, any movement will cause the belt to tighten further. Several cases of safety belt entanglement have been reported, most of them involving children. Some were fatal.

Safety experts emphasize that safety belts have saved hundreds of thousands of lives and are the best way to protect against death or injury in a crash. However, SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. recommends the following to all drivers, especially those traveling with children:

- Understand how the safety belts in your vehicle work, especially the locking mechanism. (Check your vehicle owner's manual.)
- Keep a belt cutter, safely stowed, in your vehicle for use in an emergency.
- If possible, place unused belts out of the reach of children. Lock unused belts by pulling the belt all the way out, then letting it spool back in: in many vehicles, this will safely lock the belt. If using the LATCH system to install a child's safety seat, buckle the unused belt behind the child's safety seat.

Parents, professionals and the media are invited to call the Safe Ride Helpline for further information or assistance: (800) 745-SAFE, 310/318-5111. For Spanish: (800) 747-SANO.

SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. is the national non-profit organization dedicated to child passenger safety. The organization is nationally recognized for technical expertise and program excellence. It offers a national helpline for parents and professionals, media consultation, and regular safety seat inspections.

###