

[IMAGE]

## No Argument -- Always Buckle Up

Seat belts are designed to restrain adults safely in car accidents, yet children must use these same belts as soon as they are too old to ride in a car seat. Seat belts may concentrate substantial forces on children's abdomens and spines because of their shorter stature, creating "lap-belt syndrome." Some parents, concerned about this syndrome, don't buckle up their children; others don't out of sheer neglect.

To determine if children are safer wearing or not wearing seat belts, the authors of a study in the *British Medical Journal* looked at data on 470 children, ages 4-14 years, and nearly three times as many adults involved in car accidents in Canada. Only fatalities and injuries rated at least "moderately severe" were considered.

A frightening 40% of the children involved in car accidents were not wearing seat belts. Even when their parents were belted, 22% of the children were still not buckled up. Children riding in the front seat were almost 10 times more likely to be injured or killed if not wearing seat belts; in the back seat, their odds for injury were more than doubled if not buckled up. Adults also fared better wearing seat belts. They were more than twice as likely to be injured without a belt on, no matter where they were sitting in the vehicle.

There is no debate: Adults and children should always wear seat belts. Despite the possibility of seat belts injuring a vehicle's occupant, the risk for injury and death is always higher if not wearing one. Be sure you and your kids are buckled up before you start to drive, and keep children in car seats until they are old enough to safely ride without them.

For more information about child passenger safety, visit <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/childps>.

### *Reference:*

Halman SI, Chipman M, Parkin PC, et al. Are seat belt restraints as effective in school age children as in adults? A prospective crash study. *British Medical Journal* 2002;324, pp. 1123-1126.

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