

# Children and Air Bags Don't Mix!

## Buckle up Kids in Back

Child  
Safety  
Facts  
2013

### Why can air bags be dangerous?

In a crash, an air bag opens faster than the blink of an eye. When open, front air bags in the steering wheel and dashboard cushion the driver and front seat passenger from the full force of a head-on crash. Front air bags have saved many lives of adults and teens.

The force of a front air bag is very great when it bursts out of its compartment. This force can seriously injure or kill anyone very close to it, such as:

- A baby in a rear-facing car seat (picture, right).
- A child riding in front on an adult's lap or without being buckled up.
- A driver sitting very close to the steering wheel.
- Any passenger sitting very close to the dashboard.

### Basics of Air Bag Safety

- Find out what types of air bags are in your car. (See the owner's manual and back of this sheet.) Two main types of air bags are:

**Front air bags** protect in head-on crashes. These air bags are in all cars made since 1999 and many earlier ones. The driver air bag is in the steering wheel and the passenger air bag is in the right side of the dashboard.

**Side-impact air bags** are for crashes into the side of a car. These are found in most newer cars. Some are installed only in the front seat. Many also protect passengers in the back seat.

- Buckle up kids under age 13 in the back seat whenever possible. (If your vehicle does not have a back seat, see page 2.)
- **NEVER** put a baby in a rear-facing car seat in front with a front air bag unless the air bag has been turned off.
- Most new cars have special sensors that can turn off the front air bag when a child is in the front seat (see page 2). **However**, children are still much safer in the back seat. Keep them there.



### The back seat is safest!

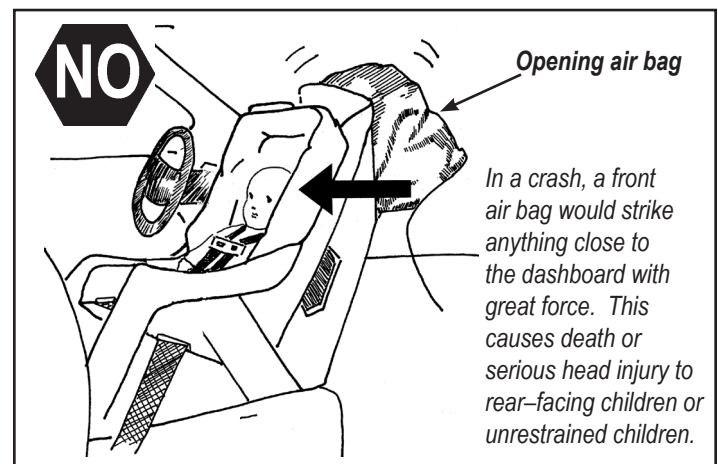
With or without an air bag, the back seat is much safer for children than the front seat. Research shows children under 13 years old are 43 percent safer in the back seat.

**Keep children in the back seat as long as possible!** In some states it is against the law to put a baby or child in the front seat.

### Air bags mean danger for rear-facing babies

If the front air bag hits a rear-facing car seat, the impact would cause severe brain injury (see picture below).

**ALWAYS** buckle up your baby rear facing in the back seat unless the air bag has been turned off.



**Remember that there is a very real danger to a baby from the passenger air bag.** The air bag could open in even a low-speed crash.

**It is very important to keep** a baby facing the rear as long as possible. Research shows that a baby facing forward can have serious head and spinal injuries in a crash.

### Older children riding in front

Any child under age 13 (or an older rider who is very small or fragile) could be killed or injured by a front air bag. Children are at risk because of their smaller size and less-developed bodies. Some behaviors make this risk even worse. A child who rides unbuckled would slide forward if the driver slams on the brakes. If the car crashes, he would be very close to the air bag as it inflates. Children using only the lap part of a seat belt or leaning forward at the time of a crash could also be killed.

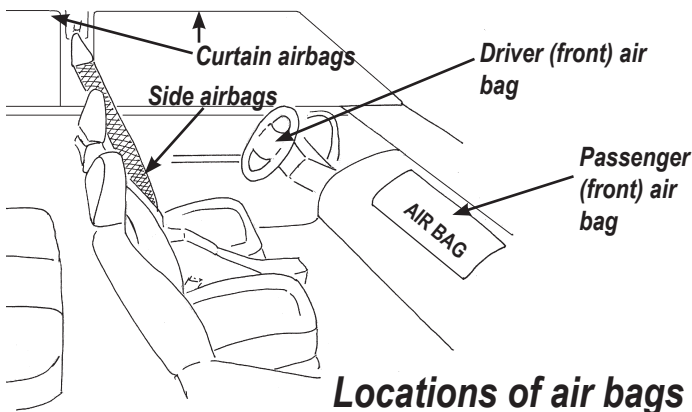
Children riding in forward-facing car seats are also at risk. (See page 2 for what to do if you *must* place a child in front.)

## Does my car have front air bags?

The car owner's manual will tell you what kinds of air bags are installed. Cars with front air bags usually have warning labels on sun visors.

A **driver air bag** is stored in the center of the steering wheel. A **passenger air bag** is stored in the dashboard.

Look on the steering wheel and dashboard for the words "AIR BAG" or other letters, such as SRS (Supplemental Restraint System) or SIR (Supplemental Inflatable Restraint).



All cars since model year 1999 must have both driver and passenger front air bags. Many cars made earlier in the 1990s may have front air bags, too.

Newer cars have air bags that inflate with lower force. The newest kind, "advanced air bags," know to inflate differently (or turn off) if the crash is minor or the passenger is too small. A light on the dashboard will tell when the air bag is off. Even with this kind, it is best to **keep children in back**.

## What about side-impact air bags?

They are not required, but most newer cars have them. They may be installed in the sides of the seats, in the door panels or door frames, or above the doors. Many models have "curtains" that drop from the ceiling to cover the side windows in front and back. Look on the seat or door frame for labels like "Air Bag," SIPS, IC, or SIAB.

A side-impact air bag or curtain inflates only a few inches toward the passenger. In a crash, it can prevent serious head or chest injury. It should not harm a child buckled up properly in a car seat or seat belt. However, some kinds might injure someone leaning against the door. Many newer vehicles have been tested to make sure their side air bags will not harm children, even ones who move out of position.

If your car has side-impact air bags in back, make sure your child does not lean against the door. Children riding in boosters may be better protected in a booster with a

high back. (Sleeping children are also safer and more comfortable in a booster with a back.) **Always** check the car seat instructions and the vehicle owner's manual for information about installing car seats near air bags.

## What if my car has no back seat or only a very small one?

Many small sports cars and pickup trucks have no back seats or there is no space there to install a car seat correctly. Many of these models come with air bag on-off switches so the driver can buckle up a baby or child in the front seat. However, manufacturers are not required to install switches. Check the owner's manual.

If your car has an on-off switch, be sure to switch it on when teens or adults ride in front, for their protection.

Newer small cars and trucks have advanced air bags. These air bags shut off automatically or have less power when a small passenger is in the front seat. The back seat is still safest! If you must put an infant or small child in the front seat, make sure you see the "air bag off" sign light up on the dashboard.

## What if I have no choice but to put a child in the front seat with an air bag?

- **Remember:** A child is much safer in the back seat. Consider all other solutions before placing a child in front.
- **Infants:** There is **NO safe way to carry an infant in the front seat in a rear-facing car seat** unless the passenger air bag has been switched **off**. Use a different car.
- **Children over age 1:** Use a forward-facing car seat installed tightly and with the harness snug. Attach the tether, whenever possible.
- **Larger children** who use a booster seat or seat belt should not lean forward or put their feet on the dashboard.
- **Move the passenger seat back** as far as possible, away from the dashboard.
- **If the car has an air bag on-off switch**, make sure it has been turned off when a child rides in front. Turn it back on to protect teens and adults. To find out about getting an on-off switch installed, contact NHTSA (see below).
- **Check the vehicle manual** for details about your air bags.

## Resources

- **NHTSA (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration):** air bag information, air bag on/off switches, 888-327-4236 or 800-424-9153 (tty), [www.safercar.gov](http://www.safercar.gov) or [www.nhtsa.gov](http://www.nhtsa.gov)
- **SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A.:** 800-745-7233, [www.carseat.org](http://www.carseat.org)
- **Find a local Child Passenger Safety Inspection Location:** 866-732-8243, [www.seatcheck.org](http://www.seatcheck.org)