Child Passenger Safety Observational/Intercept Survey

From April through October 2023 the WTSC conducted child passenger safety (CPS) observational/intercept surveys to gain insights into child restraint use and increase child passenger safety awareness. Surveys were conducted at 12 super store (e.g., Walmart, Fred Meyer) parking lots in Adams, Benton, Chelan, Douglas, Grant, King, Spokane, and Yakima counties. A total of 1,696 surveys were conducted across 96 observation hours.

I care, because it is important to protect children and assure their safety by properly restraining them in vehicles.

Drivers were asked the following questions:

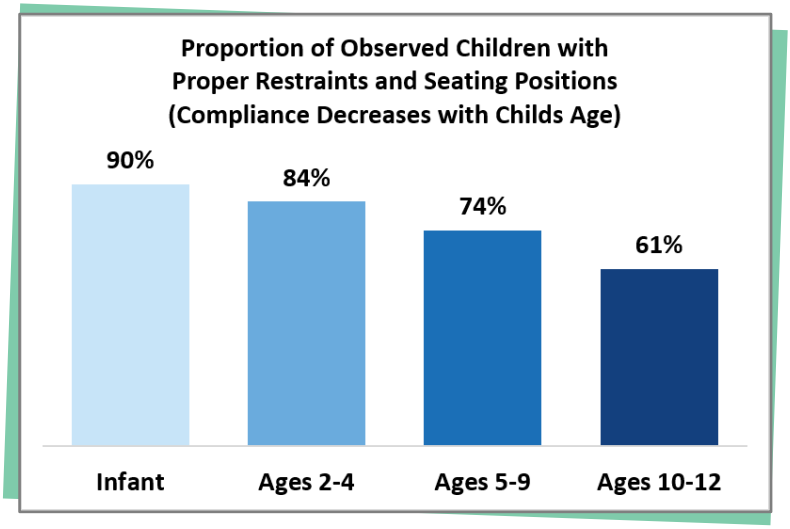
- How do you protect your children when they ride in the car?
- When is a child ready to use just a seat belt?
- How often does your child ride in a car/booster seat?
- How important do you think car/booster seats are for your child's safety?
- Where did you get your information on how to select, install, and properly use car/booster seats?

Additionally, observation teams collected information on child passenger seating position and restraint type and visually checked for mis-use.

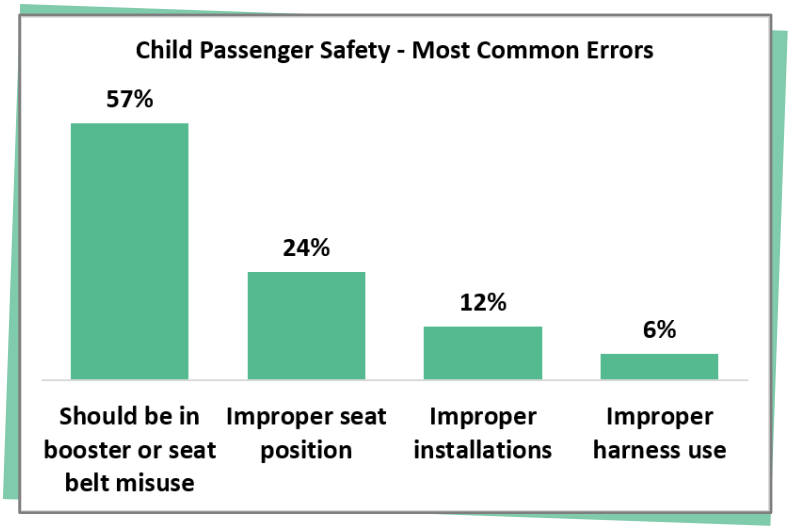
Did you know?

- 98.8% of child passengers were wearing a restraint device.
- 81.5% of child passengers were properly restrained and in the correct seating position in their vehicle.
- Children up to age 13 must ride in the back seat when practical to do so.
- Children up to age 2 must be properly secured in a rear-facing car seat.
- Children ages 2-4 must ride in a car seat with a harness (rear or forward facing).
- Children 4 and older must ride in a car or booster seat until they are 4'9" (typically 8-12 years old).
- Children over height 4'9" must be secured in a properly fitted seat belt.

Four out of five children were properly restrained and in the correct seating position in their vehicle. Nine out ten (90%) infants had proper restraints and were in the correct seating position in their vehicle. This figure decreased to 84 percent among children ages 2 to 4, to 74 percent among children ages 5 to 9, and down to 61 percent among children ages 10 to 12. This pattern indicates that compliance decreases as children get older. Washington's child restraint law states that children up to age 13 must ride in the back seat when practical to do so (RCW 46.61.687).



Among children that were not properly restrained and/or not in the correct seating position, lack of a booster seat or seat belt misuse was the most common error (57%). Improper seat position (child in front seat) was the next most common error, representing 24 percent of improperly restrained/seated children. Improper installation (12%) and improper harness use (6%) were also common errors observed.



Did you know?

- Among responding drivers, 99% indicated that car/booster seats are important for their child's safety.
- Most drivers (85%) indicated they protect their children by using a car/booster seat when they ride in the car.
- Most drivers (94%) indicated that their child always rides in a car/booster seat.
- When drivers were observed with child passengers, 96% of those drivers were wearing their seat belt.
- One quarter of drivers indicated they receive CPS information from the internet, and another one quarter indicated they received their information from a doctor/hospital.
- Nearly one in three (29%) children ages 10 to 12 were incorrectly seated in the front seat.

The diagrams below show the counts of children in their seating positions by different age groups. Nearly all infants (99%) and children ages 2 to 4 (99%) were correctly seated in the backseat. Most children ages 5 to 9 (96%) were also correctly seated in the back seat however, 34 children (3.5%) ages 5 to 9 were incorrectly seated in the front seat. Nearly one in four (28%) children ages 10 to 12 were incorrectly seated in the front seat. One infant, three children ages 3 to 4, two children ages 5 to 9, and two children ages 10 to 12 were seated in the front seat because the vehicle did not have a backseat.

Infants

Driver		3
179	28	154
1	0	0

Ages 2-4

Driver		6
479	59	366
7	0	3

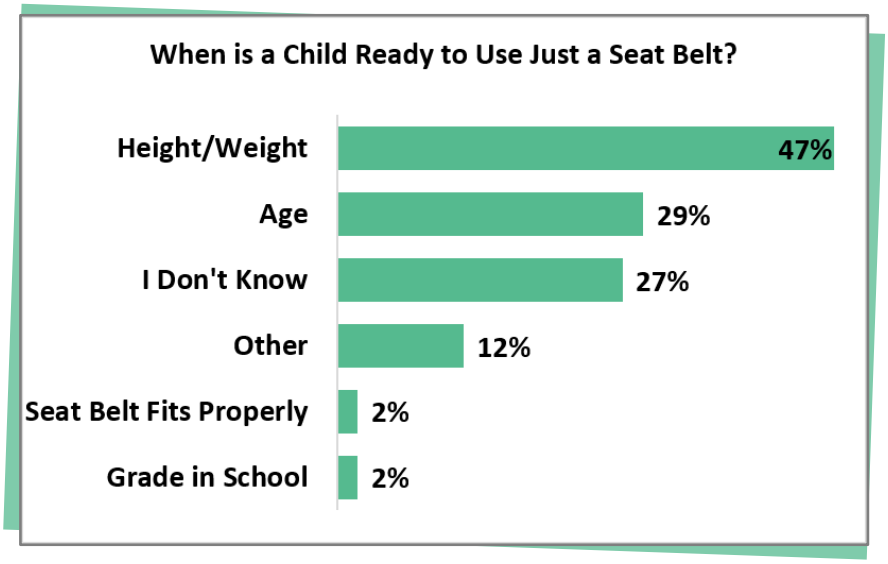
Ages 5-9

Driver		36
430	94	416
37	2	11

Ages 10-12

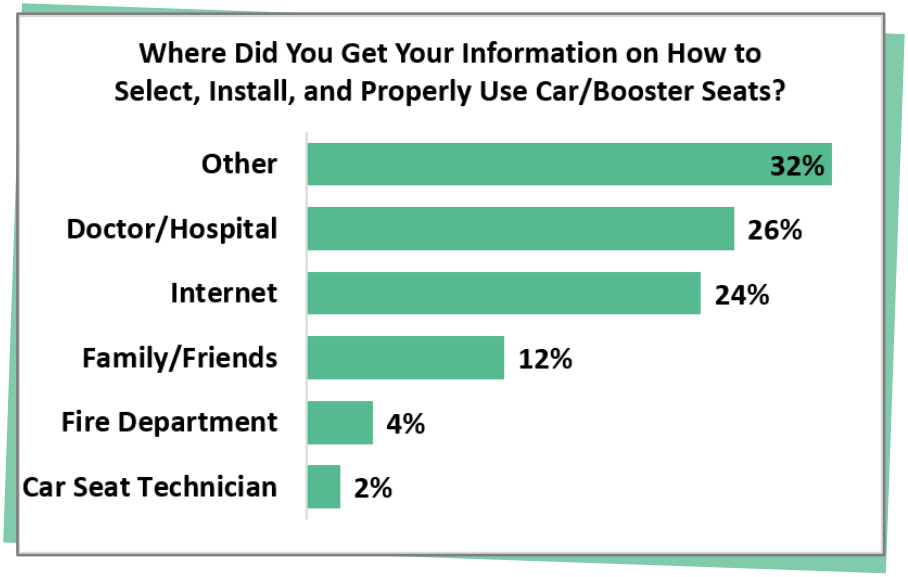
Driver		49
59	5	48
6	0	1

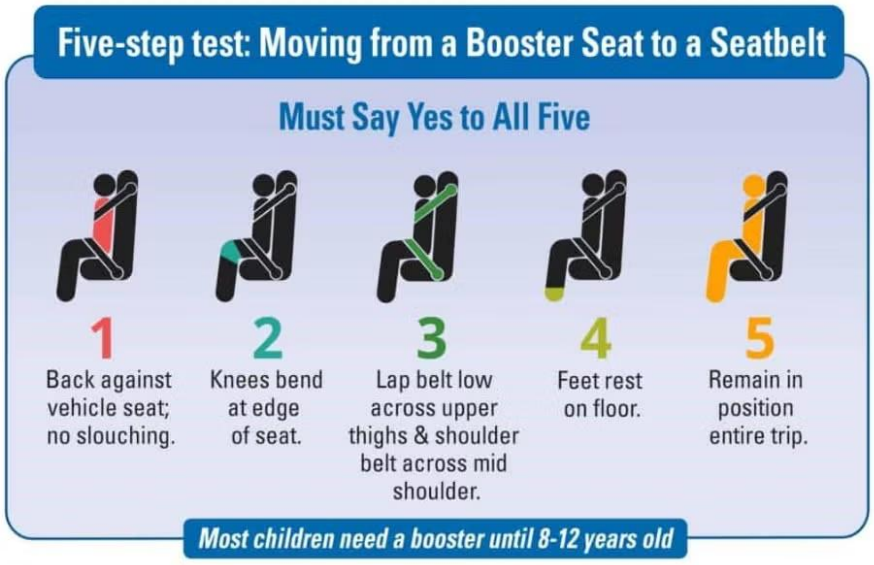
Nearly half of drivers indicated that they thought the child was ready to use just a seat belt depending on their height and weight. Nearly one-third of drivers indicated that they thought it depends on the age of the child. About a quarter of drivers did not know when a child is ready to use just a seat belt.



Drivers observed not wearing their own seat belt (4%) were more likely to also have improperly restrained child occupants (65%) than drivers observed wearing a seat belt. Conversely, 82 percent of children with drivers wearing a seat belt were properly restrained.

When asked 'where did you get your information on how to select, install, and properly use car/booster seats', one in four (26%) drivers indicated their doctor/hospital. Another one in four (24%) indicated they received their information from the internet. Another 12 percent received information from their family/ friends. The majority (32%) of drivers received their information from 'other' sources. One of the most common other sources was referring to the manual/packaging for the car/booster seat—accounting for approximately half of other sources of information.





Additional Resources
WTSC Child Passenger Safety Program.
https://wacarseats.com/

For more information, please contact the WTSC Research and Data Division at (360) 725-9860.