# Tanya's Tips for Safety Success

By TANYA WASHINGTON, R.N., C.S., N.P
*Chief Safety Officer*
*Texas Medical Center*



As the holidays approach, an abundance of automotive traffic will hit the nation's streets and highways. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration statistics show that the extended Thanksgiving holiday weekend is one of the year's busiest.

With this in mind, adults and teens need to be aware of proper safety belt use. But just as importantly, they need to be aware of the correct way to use child safety seats.

NHTSA statistics show that each year in the United States, 1,800 children under age 14 die in motor vehicle crashes, and more than 274,000 are injured. These statistics suggest that with or without laws, approximately three in 10 children ages 4 and under ride without any restraint, and of those who were actually buckled up, four of five were not restrained correctly.

A child advocacy group, the National Safe Kids Campaign, chaired by former U.S. Surgeon General, Dr. C. Everett Koop, is the "first and only national organization dedicated solely to the prevention of unintentional childhood injury – the number one killer of children 14 and under." The more than 200 state and local Safe Kids coalitions in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico, are comprised of parents, teachers, health care providers, and police, among others. The group's goal is to educate the public and prevent childhood accidents and injuries.

A recently released study by the group shows that most states do not have adequate laws to protect children riding in vehicles.

The Safe Kids Campaign rated each state and its laws with a 100-point system, assigning an A through F grading system similar to what children receive on report cards. Eighteen states plus the District of Columbia received Ds, and 24 states received Fs.

California scored the only A for having laws that specify the need for age- and size-appropriate restraints, like booster seats for children ages 4 to 5. Texas was among the states that failed, receiving only 51.62 points out of the possible 100.

In light of the failing grade that our state received, here is a one-minute safety checklist, produced in May of this year by the NHTSA, to ensure that children are restrained correctly.

**• All children under age 12 should ride properly restrained in the back seat.**

**• Never place a child safety seat in the front seat where a front-mounted passenger air bag is present.**

**Do you have and understand the instructions?**

• Always read the child seat use and installation instruction manual. If you can't install it, or don't understand the instructions, contact the local police department. They will show you how to install the seat for free. Many conduct child seat safety clinics several times a year.

• Read your vehicle owner's manual seatbelt and child seat installation section.

**Infants, from birth until about age 1, and at least 20 pounds, should ride in the back seat in a rear-facing safety seat.**

• Harness straps should be at or below the infant's shoulders.

• Harness straps should fit snugly. The straps should lie in a relatively straight line, without sagging.

• The harness chest clip should be placed at the infant's armpit level. This keeps the harness straps positioned properly.

• Infants weighing 20 pounds or more before age 1 should ride in a safety seat rated for heavier infants. (Some rear-facing convertible seats are rated for children between 30 and 35 pounds.)

**Children over age 1 and at least 20 pounds may ride forward facing in the back seat. Children should ride in a safety seat with full harness until they weigh about 40 pounds.**

• Harness straps should be at or above the child's shoulders.

• Harness straps should be threaded through the top slots, in most cases.

• Harness should be snug. Straps should lie in a relatively straight line without sagging.

• Harness chest clip should be at the child's armpit level, which helps keep the harness straps positioned properly on the child's shoulders.

**Children between 40 and 80 pounds should ride in the back seat in a belt-positioning booster seat, which uses the adult lap and shoulder belt. Booster seats should be used until the adult lap and shoulder belt fit children properly.**

• Belt-positioning boosters can only be used with both the lap and shoulder belt across the child. The shoulder belt should be snug against the child's chest, resting across the collarbone. The lap belt should lay low across the child's upper thigh area.

• Boosters should be used as "in between" safety devices for children who weigh more than 40 pounds and have outgrown a forward-facing child seat.

• Booster seats should be used until the child can sit with his or her back against the vehicle seat back cushion, knees bent over the seat cushion edge, and feet on the floor (approximately 4 feet, 9 inches tall).

A safety seat can only protect a child if it is used correctly and installed properly. The state of Texas needs to shoot for a passing grade, and will only succeed by following the tips above. Let's make this holiday season a safe one.■

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# Traffic Update

Through Jan. 7, various intersections in the Texas Medical Center will be closed on weekends due to METRORail construction. Closure dates will be Saturdays and Sundays, but closures will begin on Friday evenings after 7 p.m. and the work may continue until 6 a.m. on Mondays.

Dates and locations of closures are::

| John Freeman | Ross Sterling | N. MacGregor |
|---|---|---|
| 11/17 - 11/18 | 12/1 - 12/2 | 12/8 - 12/9 |
| 12/8 - 12/9 | 12/8 - 12/9 | 12/15 - 12/16 |
| | | 1/5 - 1/6 |

(This schedule is subject to change based on weather conditions.)

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