

Child restraint rate highest ever reported; safety belt usage rate holds steady

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Alabamians are buckling up and ensuring their children's safety through the use of car seats. The 2002 survey results show that Alabama's child restraint usage rate is a staggering 89 percent, a 16 percent increase in restraint use as compared to 2000's rate of 77 percent. The safety belt usage rate held steady at 79 percent, the same as last year's, which was the highest ever reported in the state, and exceeded the national average.

"We are pleased to see these rates in Alabama, especially the landmark child restraint rate. There were several educational and enforcement efforts that contributed to these results," said Dr. Donald Williamson, state health officer.

Key legislation in recent years, such as the Primary Seatbelt Law and the "Click It or Ticket" campaign, were factors in improved child restraint and safety belt usage in the state. The Primary Seatbelt Law passed in December 1999 allows law enforcement officials to stop and cite motor vehicle occupants not wearing their seat belts whether or not another violation has occurred.

Also, through the "Click It or Ticket" campaign state, county and municipal law enforcement agencies conduct massive enforcement of the state's safety belt laws, with special emphasis on public safety checkpoints.

"Enforcement will always have a direct impact on people, and adult driver seatbelt use is a strong factor leading to child restraint usage," said Dr. King.

The unprecedented child restraint rate is also the result of organizations such as the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH), Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA), Children's Health System, Alabama Department of Transportation, and Alabama Department of Public Safety working together to educate the public about the importance of child restraint and providing assistance to the public on the proper procedures for restraining a child.

"This increased rate is the result of a very effective synergy of all these groups working together," said Dr. Bill King, director of the Alabama SAFE KIDS Campaign, Children's Health System. "It truly illustrates the power of education, legislation, enforcement and service working together to effect positive changes in behavior."

Although the high child restraint usage rate is encouraging, it is important to note that 80 to 90 percent of child seats are improperly installed. To help correct this problem, these organizations work to increase awareness of the need for appropriate seats and installation. For example, Alabama SAFE KIDS has accepted the lead in the state for conducting training which leads to child passenger safety certification. In three years the organization has trained 380 individuals.

Currently, 330 certified child passenger safety specialists and 14 instructors assist parents in the correct installation of car seats at check-up events and through 14 permanent fitting stations statewide. Training is provided statewide to fire department personnel, law enforcement, hospitals and others. Funding from the National Highway Safety Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and ADECA support these efforts.

Citizens can also call the Children's Health Service hotline at 1-800-504-9768 to receive information on selecting the right car seat, locating a fitting station near them or setting up a check-up event in their area.

Based on 2001 data, a typical driver in Alabama has a 54 percent probability of being involved in an injury or fatal crash while driving an automobile during his or her lifetime. Using proper restraint can reduce your risk of injury and death. Here are some tips on proper restraint for children.

PROTECT CHILDREN AS THEY GROW.

- * Rear-facing infant seats- birth to at least age 1 and at least 20 pounds.
- * Forward-facing child safety seats- age 1 to about age 4 and 20 to 40 pounds.
- * Booster seat- about ages 4 to 8 and under 4-feet-9-inches tall.
- * Lap and shoulder belts- at least age 8 or over 4-feet-9-inches tall.
- * Check with an expert and always read a car owner's manual for advice on installing safety seats properly.

The usage rates are determined by observational surveys conducted by ADPH throughout Alabama. The survey, check-up events and other activities are supported by funds from ADECA through the NHTSA.

For more information on child restraint and safety belt facts, please visit the ADPH's Web site at www.adph.org/injuryprevention

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[Estimated Child Restraint Usage in Alabama by Year \(1981-2002\)](#)

[Estimated Child Restraint Usage Rates by Surveyed Counties in Alabama \(2002\)](#)

[Estimated Safety Belt Usage in Alabama by Year \(1984-2002\)](#)

[Estimated Seat Belt Usage Rates by Surveyed Counties in Alabama \(2002\)](#)

