



## NEWS RELEASE

### ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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## Child restraint and seat belt rates encouraging

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Alabamians are continuing to buckle up and use child safety seats. According to 2003 observational surveys, child restraint use was 87 percent in the state, declining slightly from the unprecedented 89 percent recorded in 2002. Seat belt usage was 77 percent in 2003 as compared with 79 percent in 2002, a rate which exceeded the national average.

"Motor-vehicle related deaths are the number one cause of death due to injury in our state," said State Health Officer Dr. Donald Williamson. "Continued educational efforts, as well as continued law enforcement initiatives are needed."

Injury and death due to motor-vehicle crashes can be prevented through the use of seat belts and child safety seats. In 2002, 1,038 people were killed and over 44,000 were injured in motor vehicle crashes. Of those killed, 50 percent were not wearing safety restraints.

"The only way to prevent declining use of seat belts and child safety seats is through continued education and enforcement programs which inform the public of the importance of seat belts and child safety seats. They mean the difference between life and death," said Nancy Wright, Director of the Injury Education Branch at the Alabama Department of Public Health.

It is also important to realize that although 87 percent of Alabamians are using car seats, 4 out of 5 seats are improperly installed.

Currently, there are 14 permanent fitting stations statewide with certified child passenger safety specialists and instructors to assist parents in the correct installation of car seats. Funding from the National Highway Safety Traffic Safety Administration and the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs supports these efforts.

Other efforts throughout the state to improve restraint include law enforcement legislation such as Primary Seatbelt Law and the campaign "Click it or Ticket", which were factors in the steady seat belt usage rate of 79 percent in 2001 and 2002.

"There is a correlation in adult seat belt usage and child restraint usage. So we must continue to inform adults about restraining themselves in addition to restraining their children," said Wright.

PROTECT CHILDREN AS THEY GROW.

\* Rear-facing infant seats- birth to at least age 1 **and** less than 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 and 40 to 80 pounds.

\* 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.

For more information on child restraint and seat belt facts, please visit the Alabama Department of Public Health's Web site at [www.adph.org/injuryprevention](http://www.adph.org/injuryprevention).

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