

Keeping safe

A law designed to ensure that children are safe when travelling by car is being enforced differently across the UK

Drivers must ensure that children aged up to 12 must be carried in a suitable child restraint, following a law that was introduced nine months ago.

Transport Minister Stephen Ladyman estimates this could help prevent more than 2,000 child deaths or injuries a year.

Under the law, police have the power to issue warnings or on-the-spot fines to parents not complying with the law. However, the law seems to be applied inconsistently across the country.

North Yorkshire, South Yorkshire and Greater Manchester police, for example, have said they're not issuing fines to those breaking the law and offer advice instead.

A South Yorkshire police spokesman said its officers had decided not to fine people for 'what is considered a minor

South Yorkshire officers had decided not to fine people for what is considered a minor infringement

infringement. We want people to concentrate on the more weighty things. It is about dangerous people, drink-drivers and drug-drivers'.

In contrast, Cleveland police issued 49 fines in the six months after the law was introduced. Acting Inspector David Lislie said that they did not consider failure to obey the law by wearing an appropriate child restraint a minor matter.

We asked Which? members how aware they were of the law and found that of the 413 people we surveyed, 93 per cent knew the law's main point and the majority knew there was an exception for emergency journeys and taxi rides.

Our test has found there are plenty of good, safe child seats to choose from and four worth avoiding.

The law says

Child seats in cars and vans

Aged under 3/15kg

Must wear an appropriate child restraint if travelling in the front or rear seat of a car^a

Up to 135cm/31kg

Must wear an appropriate child restraint if travelling in the front or rear seat of a car^a

Over 135cm/aged 12+

Must wear a seat belt if one is fitted^a

^a The only exceptions are in taxis; on emergency (unplanned) journeys where an appropriate restraint is not available; or where two occupied child seats in the rear prevent the fitting of a third child seat. In this case the adult seat belt should be used

Buying and fitting a seat

Group 0 ➔ **0-10kg**

Group 0+ ➔ **0-13kg**

(from birth to about 12 months)

Group 1 ➔ **9-18kg**

(about 9 months to 4 years)

Group 2 ➔ **15-25kg**

(about 4 to 6 years)

Group 3 ➔ **22-36kg**

(about 6 to 12 years)

■ THE RIGHT SIZE

Seats are classified according to a child's weight (above).

Some span different groups, but multi-group seats tend to

be a compromise. As a child's body changes, what's needed from a seat changes, too.

■ HOW IT'S ATTACHED

Isofix is a system where two metal catches are welded to the car and the Isofix seat 'plugs' in to these. This is intended to make fitting the seat easier and ensure it attaches more rigidly. The alternative is to use the adult belt to secure the child seat.

■ CORRECT FITTING

The shop that sold you the seat is best placed to advise on whether it's fitted correctly. The Royal Society for Prevention of Accidents (www.childcarseats.org.uk) also has good advice.

■ COMMON MISTAKES

For some group 0+ and group 1 seats, the adult belt straps in the seat. You can maximise safety by making the seat as rigidly attached as possible.



If you're using a seat secured using the car seat belt, check your handbook to see whether it has an automatic locking retractor to secure the seat tightly. When using group 2/3 seats, the child and restraint are both retained by the car seat belt, so make sure your child is tightly strapped in and that the belt passes around the pelvic bone and over the shoulder, not the soft stomach or neck area.



Don't Buys

There are four seats we recommend you avoid.

These are the Chicco Max-3S (18), the Recaro Start (20) and the Little Shield Combi 123 (21) as they all use the adult seat belt for a 9kg child (around nine months old).

The Mamas and Papas Pro-Tour (19) turns into a 'booster cushion' for children above 22kg so it's also a Don't Buy. Booster cushions fulfil the legal requirement for children between 15kg and 36kg but don't offer protection from side impacts (unlike our Best Buys).

The worst seat that we tested was the Little Shield Combi 123, which uses a nylon strap with stud fixing as a seat belt guide, which isn't strong enough to contain the forces of a severe accident.

You might notice how light it is (1kg). That's because it would offer little protection from side impacts. The most important thing to stress is that any child seat is better than no seat at all – and it's now the law to use one.



**1 CHILDREN UP TO 13KG**

82% Maxi-Cosi Cabriofix £200

Our testing has become even tougher since we made this a Best Buy last year, but it still passed with flying colours – achieving our first five-star child seat result. Crash protection is excellent, and instructions are clear. It scores 82 per cent only with its Easyfix base (an Isofix system) so if your car doesn't have this, go for another Best Buy. It's available at Halfords, Mothercare and Toys R Us. **WE SAY** The base is heavy, so you might want to leave it fixed in the car.

Cheapest store Mothercare

WHICH?
BEST BUY
**2 CHILDREN UP TO 13KG**

79% Britax Cosy Tot Isofix £175

This was also a Best Buy last year, when tested with its Isofix base and using this, there's little danger of installing the seat incorrectly. Without the base, the seat does not score as well for safety, because relying on the car seat belt to secure it inevitably introduces some slack. It's available at Halfords and Toys R Us.

WORTH KNOWING Having an Isofix base gives you the option of using it in a car that has this system.

Cheapest store Toys R Us

WHICH?
BEST BUY

The design of the Recaro Young Profi Plus offers good protection from front and side crashes

**3 CHILDREN UP TO 13KG**

78% Recaro Young Profi Plus £185

The design offers good protection from both front and side crashes, so safety is a strong point here. It's easy to install and difficult to get wrong. The view out for the child may be a bit limited and gloomy. This is another Isofix base-and-seat combo, and we tested with both. It's available from Halfords.

WE LIKE The seat cover is easily washable.

Cheapest store Halfords

WHICH?
BEST BUY
**4 CHILDREN UP TO 13KG**

73% Bébécar Easy Maxi SPP £100

Clever design allows you to change the fixed points of the harness easily as your child grows. This is not always the case with seats in this group – you sometimes have to unthread it. One reason we like these kinds of Isofix seat is that they are rigidly attached to the car but are still easy to remove. It's available from independent stores.

WORTH KNOWING The instructions are clear and it's lightweight, too.

Cheapest stores Independents

WHICH?
BEST BUY
**5 CHILDREN UP TO 13KG**

70% Maxi-Cosi Citi £65

This seat restrained the dummy safely in a frontal crash in our test. It's easy to install and is even quite lightweight. It is held in place by a seat belt – unlike some of the other Best Buys – so it's ideal if your car doesn't have Isofix mounting points. Our only criticism concerns side impact, where the Citi scored only an 'average' rating. Available from independent shops.

WE LIKE The baby might enjoy this seat as it offers a good view out.

Cheapest stores Independents

WHICH?
BEST BUY
**10 CHILDREN 9-18KG**

75% Maxi-Cosi Priorifix £199

We found this the safest group 1 seat. There's also a clever feature on the support leg that tells you whether you've installed it correctly – an indicator turns green when the leg is properly seated on the car floor. You might want to think twice if you want to remove the seat regularly, as this is the heaviest at 13.9kg. Available from Halfords, John Lewis and Toys R Us.

WE LIKE Good padding and leg support ensure your child is comfy.

Cheapest store John Lewis

WHICH?
BEST BUY



11 CHILDREN 9-18KG

70% Britax Duo Plus Isofix £149

The Duo Plus can add an even greater level of safety to your child's journey if you have the right car. It has a top tether which will attach to a car fitted with the same system and helps ensure the seat stays more rigid. Our testers also noted the excellent quality of the finish and the ease of removing the seat cover for washing. Your child will enjoy excellent seat padding and a good view out. It's available from Halfords, John Lewis and Toys R Us.

WE FOUND The instructions are clear.

Cheapest store John Lewis

WHICH?
BEST
BUY



12 CHILDREN 9-18KG

70% Chicco Key 1 Isofix £170

This seat doesn't offer as much protection in a crash when secured with seat belts (the seat-belted version is called the Chicco Key 1 X-Plus) so we can recommend it only as an Isofix seat. Like the BébécAR Easy Maxi SPP (4), the height of the shoulder straps can be adjusted easily, without having to unthread the harness. If you were to move it from car to car, you might need help, as it weighs in at 13kg. It's available from Toys R Us.

WE LIKE It's easy to buckle up.

Cheapest store Toys R Us

WHICH?
BEST
BUY

How we test

Why we bought £27,000 dummies

Dummy costs

Our three new crash-test dummies have more realistic neck, head and limb movement than previous models to better represent an average 18-month-, three- and six-year-old.

Simulated crash

Our tests are stricter than the legal minimum

standard which we feel isn't tough enough. We simulate crashes with forces used in Euro NCAP vehicle crash tests, which more accurately reflect what happens in a real crash.

We fire a Vauxhall Astra car body down a track, then stop it. The tests are recorded with super-slow-motion cameras, and the dummies are equipped with acceleration sensors to help

determine whether a child would survive the impact of the crash.

Easy to install?

We check whether a seat is easy to install and buckle up (including setting the belt tension) and take a detailed look at the instruction booklet to see whether it is clear.

The best seats have an indicator that lets you know when the harness is sufficiently tightened.

The Jané Matrix Cup (9) scores poorly here, because we felt that the choice of ways it could be installed increased the risk of fitting it wrongly, and buckling up was complicated.



MODEL	SPECIFICATION			FRONT CRASH
	PRICE (£)	WEIGHT CATEGORY	WEIGHT OF SEAT (kg)	
CHILDREN BIRTH TO 13kg				
1 MAXI-COSI Cabriofix	200	0+	3.5/8.7	★★★★★
2 BRITAX Cosy Tot Isofix	175	0+	3.2/5.3	★★★★★
3 RECARO Young Profi Plus	185	0+	4.2/6	★★★★★
4 BÉBÉCAR Easy Maxi SPP	100	0+	3.9	★★★★★
5 MAXI-COSI Citi	65	0+	2.7	★★★★★
6 BÉBÉ CONFORT Creatisfix	150	0+	3.8	★★★★★
7 PHIL & TEDS Bébé Car Seat	70	0+	2.8	★★★★★
8 CONCORD Ion	96	0+	4.1	★★★★★
9 JANÉ Matrix Cup	160	0+	5.6	★★★★★
CHILDREN 9-18kg				
10 MAXI-COSI Priorifix	199	1	13.9	★★★★★
11 BRITAX Duo Plus Isofix	149	1	8.5	★★★★★
12 CHICCO Key 1 Isofix	170	1	13	★★★★★
13 CONCORD Trimax	90	1	5.7	★★★★★
14 MAXI-COSI Tobi	150	1	8.5	★★★★★
15 RECARO Young Expert Plus	155	1	11.2/6	★★★★★
16 CHICCO Key 1 X-Plus	129	1	8.4	★★★★★
CHILDREN 9-36kg				
17 RECARO Young Sport	160	1, 2, 3	8.2	★★★★★
18 CHICCO Max-3S	70	1, 2, 3	3.6	★★★★★
19 MAMAS & PAPAS Pro-Tour	100	1, 2, 3	6.9	★★★★★
20 RECARO Start	195	1, 2, 3	9.6	★★★★★
21 LITTLE SHIELD Combi 123	45	1, 2, 3	1	★★★★★
CHILDREN 15-36kg				
22 BRITAX Evolva 2/3 Isofit	120	2, 3	7.6	★★★★★
23 MAXI-COSI Rodi XR	80	2, 3	4.9	★★★★★
24 BRITAX Evolva 2/3 Ultra	85	2, 3	6.7	★★★★★
25 CONCORD Lift Evo PT	95	2, 3	5.2	★★★★★
26 CYBEX Solution S	90	2, 3	5.8	★★★★★

USING THE TABLE

We tested latest models from leading brands. The more stars the better.

Specification

Price For Best Buys, we give the cheapest, widely available high-street price. Prices for other models are a guide. We don't recommend

that you buy online as you won't be able to check the fit of the seat in your car.

Weight category For an explanation of how car child seats are classified for use, see 'Buying and fitting a seat', p70.

Test performance

Front crash/Side crash We

WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE								SCORE %
SIDE CRASH	OVERALL CRASH SAFETY	EASE OF USE AND COMFORT	CHANCE OF INCORRECT INSTALLATION	FITTING IN CAR	INSTRUCTIONS	COMFORT FOR THE CHILD	EASE OF CLEANING	
★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	82
★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	79
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★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	56

simulated crashes with forces used in our Euro NCAP car crash tests. These reflect what happens in extreme front and side crashes. **Overall crash safety** Includes factors such as seat design, head support and stability on the car seat, as well as front and side crash performance. A front crash, side crash, or overall safety score of one star, limits the total test

score a model can achieve. We test the seats in as many configurations as the instructions from the manufacturers recommend. We show the scores for the worst-case mode of use for each seat. **Ease of use and comfort** This includes how Easily the belt threads through the seat and how easy it is to strap the child in securely.

Fitting in car How easy it is to install the seat correctly in a car. **Instructions** How comprehensive and clear the instructions and labels for the seat are.

Score

This ignores price and is based on:

Safety
Ease of use

60%
40%

Contacts

Bébécarr

020 8201 0505
www.bebecar.co.uk

Bébé Confort

020 8236 0707
www.bebekonfort.com

Britax

01264 386027
www.britax.co.uk

Chicco

01623 750870
www.chicco.co.uk

Child Accident Prevention Trust

020 7608 3828
www.capt.org.uk

Child Car Seat Advice (Rospa)

0121 248 2000
www.childcarseats.org.uk

Concord

01273 764744
www.concord.de

Cybex

01692 408802
www.eastcoastnursery.co.uk

Fisher Price

01628 500303
www.fisher-price.com

Jané

028 9084 9045
www.johnstonprams.co.uk

Little Shield

01462 484858
www.littleshield.com

Mamas & Papas

0870 830 7700
www.mamasandpapas.co.uk

Maxi-Cosi

020 8236 0707
www.maxi-cosi.com

Phil & Teds

01234 344 230
www.philandteds.com

Recaro

01926 484111
www.recaro.com

Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (Rospa)

0121 248 2000
www.rospa.com

THINK! Road Safety

www.thinkroadsafety.gov.uk

FIND OUT MORE

Safest seats

Visit www.which.co.uk to find out our answers to some of the most frequently asked questions about child car seats, including rear-facing seats, carrycots and buckle crunch.



22 CHILDREN 15-36KG

77% Britax Evolva 2/3 Isofix £120

Unusually for a seat in this group, the Evolva 2/3 uses Isofix.

Helpfully, this holds the seat in place while there isn't a child in it – anyone who has a group 2/3 seat will already know that they're not usually tied in the car unless children are sitting in them. The Evolva 2/3 Isofix is available from Toys R Us.

WORTH KNOWING The performance of this seat is very similar to that of the Britax Evolva 2/3 Ultra, which is also a Best Buy (see right).

Cheapest store Toys R Us

WHICH?
BEST
BUY



23 CHILDREN 15-36KG

75% Maxi-Cosi Rodi XR £80

We first tested this in 2004 and it's still a great group 2/3 seat. In some cases, the fit of the seat is improved when the rear headrest is removed from the car seat – this allows the backrest to sit flat on the seat back. Installation is very simple, and difficult to get wrong. It's lightweight, too, so it's easy to transfer it from car to car. Our only criticism concerns the seat cover, which is difficult to remove for cleaning. It's available from Halfords, John Lewis and Toys R Us.

WE LIKE The instructions are clear.

Cheapest store Halfords

WHICH?
BEST
BUY

The Maxi-Cosi Rodi XR is lightweight so it's easy to transfer from car to car



24 CHILDREN 15-36KG

74% Britax Evolva 2/3 Ultra £85

Our experts thought that this seat was suitable for children aged four to 12. There are good instructions and it's easy to carry. As it isn't secured in with the Isofix system, it might fall over in the car if your child isn't sitting in it – a minor complaint for an otherwise excellent seat which our testers praised for its high finish quality.

It's available from Halfords, John Lewis, Toys R Us and independents.

WORTH KNOWING The covers are easily washable.

Cheapest stores Independents

WHICH?
BEST
BUY



25 CHILDREN 15-36KG

72% Concord Lift Evo PT £95

This is another recommended group 2/3 seat that uses the conventional adult belt method of fixing.

It's comfortable, provides good leg support and is reasonably lightweight, so is easy to move from car to car. Children prone to snoozing within minutes of leaving the house, will appreciate the good head support the Lift Evo PT offers. It's available from Halfords.

WORTH KNOWING It's easy to adjust the seat as your child grows.

Cheapest store Halfords

WHICH?
BEST
BUY

Are there dangers to child seats?

There has been concern over babies sitting upright in the seats on long journeys

Is there any danger in leaving your child upright wearing a seat belt on a long car journey?

Some media attention has focused on 'oxygen deprivation' in infants. The danger seems to stem from very young and premature babies sitting upright for long periods of time.

Child Accident Prevention Trust Projects Director Mike Hayes (pictured right) said: 'Paediatricians know that premature and very low-birthweight babies may be more prone to breathing problems, and should advise parents of such children accordingly.'

He said that correctly fitted restraints used consistently, can reduce the severity of injuries and save lives in a crash. Our advice is use

common sense – your baby will need regular feeding and changing stops on any journey. It's unlikely you'll be able to travel more than 90 minutes without stopping to give your newborn some attention.

Only one product we tested, the Jané Matrix Cup (9), allows you to have your baby lying flat – but the seat's crash performance in this mode wasn't as good as other seats.



When we last tested carrycots in 2004, their safety performance was so poor we couldn't recommend them. Manufacturers seem to have got the message and there are very few still on sale.

Unless your baby has special needs, a rear-facing restraint is still the safest way to transport them.

Remember that transporting your baby in a rear-facing child seat in the front seat of a car equipped with a passenger airbag can be lethal. There is sometimes a switch to disable the airbag, but in other cases you need to contact your car dealer to have this done.

The consequences of not doing this can be fatal, as the airbag itself inflates with such force that the baby's head hits the back of the seat.