SEAT BELTS AND child restraints

Always wear a seatbelt

www.dft.gov.uk/think
wearing a seat belt

SAVES LIVES

Seat belt wearing saves over 2,000 lives every year. Everyone knows they should wear a seat belt in the front seat, but many people still don't realise how dangerous it is not to wear a seat belt in the back.

**IN A CRASH AT 30MPH, IF YOU ARE UNRESTRAINED, YOU WILL HIT THE FRONT SEAT, AND ANYONE IN IT, WITH A FORCE OF BETWEEN 30 AND 60 TIMES YOUR OWN BODY WEIGHT.**

This could result in death or serious injury to you and people sitting in the front seat.

Any compensation for injury following an accident may be reduced if you were not wearing a seat belt.
the law

In law:

- You must wear a seat belt in cars and goods vehicles where one is fitted. There are very few exceptions to this. The driver is liable to prosecution if a child under 14 years does not wear a seat belt or child restraint.
- You must not carry an unrestrained child in the front seat of any vehicle.
- Children up to 135cms in height must use the appropriate child restraint when travelling in any car, van or goods vehicle - there are very few exceptions.
- A child may use an adult belt when they reach 135cm in height or the age of 12 (whichever is reached first).
- In buses and coaches with seat belts fitted, passengers aged 14 years and above must use them. Regulations will be brought in as soon as possible to require children 3 to 13 years to use seat belts (or child restraints) in these vehicles. Passengers in public far-paying buses used wholly on 30mph roads are exempt.

The law in respect of cars, vans and goods vehicles is summarised in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>FRONT SEAT</th>
<th>REAR SEAT</th>
<th>WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Driver</td>
<td>Seat belt must be worn if fitted</td>
<td>Correct child restraint must be used</td>
<td>Driver</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child under 3 years</td>
<td>Correct child restraint must be used</td>
<td>Correct child restraint must be used</td>
<td>Driver</td>
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<td>Child from 3rd</td>
<td>Correct child restraint must be used</td>
<td>Correct child restraint must be used</td>
<td>Driver</td>
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<td>Birthday up to 135cm</td>
<td>Correct child restraint must be used</td>
<td>Correct child restraint must be used</td>
<td>Driver</td>
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<td>in height (approx 4ft</td>
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<td>5ins) (or 12th birthday, whichever they reach first)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child 12 or 13, or over 135cms (approx 4ft 5ins) in height</td>
<td>Adult seat belt must be worn if available</td>
<td>Adult seat belt must be worn if available</td>
<td>Driver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult passengers</td>
<td>Seat belt must be worn if available</td>
<td>Seat belt must be worn if available</td>
<td>Passenger</td>
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</table>
which vehicles does the LAW AFFECT?

All vehicles where seat belts are fitted, including vans and other goods vehicles, buses, minibuses and coaches.

what if there are NOT ENOUGH SEAT BELTS AVAILABLE?

Seat belt wearing law does not prevent you from carrying more adult passengers than there are seat belts. However, children up to 135cm in height must have child restraints with few exceptions. It is an offence if the way in which passengers are carried causes danger to any person in the vehicle. Do not overload a vehicle. If you have adult passengers without a seat belt remember that they can cause injury to others in an accident.

Children 3 years and over can only travel in the back of a vehicle without seat belts (e.g. a classic car) and those under 3 years cannot be carried at all.
Never put the same seat belt around two children, or around yourself and another passenger (adult or child).

Do not allow your child to use the adult belt too early (see pages 7 and 10).

Lap-and-diagonal belts provide more protection and should be used before lap-only belts.

Adjust the seat belt so that the lap belt is as low as possible across the hip bones—not over the stomach. Make sure the diagonal strap lies across the chest and away from the neck. It should slope up and back to the top fixing point and not be twisted. In many cars, you can adjust the height of the top fixing point to make this easier. Do not leave any slack in the belt.

Do not try to improve seat belt comfort with padding or cushions or sit on any mats or cushions. If you find your seat belt is really uncomfortable, ask the vehicle manufacturer if they have a recommended comfort device.

The centre rear seats of many cars are fitted with a lap-only seat belt that must be adjusted manually. It is important that you adjust such belts for a snug fit over your hips, without any slack.

The lap strap should go across the hips, fitting comfortably under the bump, while the diagonal strap should be placed between the breasts and around the bump.

Like any other driver or passenger, pregnant women must wear a seat belt. There is no automatic exemption for them. Wearing a belt may not be comfortable, but it improves safety for both mother and unborn baby.
airbags

- Airbag systems differ from car to car, therefore always check and follow specific advice from the manufacturer or in the owner’s handbook. This is particularly important in relation to children and frontal airbags.
- Studies show that airbags reduce severe head injuries in accidents. However, airbags are not substitutes for seat belts – they are designed to work with them. Given the speed and force with which an airbag inflates, it is vitally important that you always wear your seat belt and that you do not sit too close to the steering wheel or dashboard. We recommend that the distance between the centre of the steering wheel to your breastbone should be at least 10 inches (25cm).
- The law prohibits the use of a rear facing baby seat against an active frontal airbag.

disabled PERSON’S BELTS

Disabled drivers or passengers (adult or children) may need to use specially adapted belts known as "disabled person’s belts". Their design may differ from the standard lap or 3-point seat belt and they are intended for use solely by disabled people.
child RESTRANINT SYSTEMS

Injuries to children can be significantly reduced by using a suitable child restraint. They must be approved to the United Nations ECE Regulation 44.03 or subsequent standards (e.g. 44.04). These give the weight range for the children who may use them. You must use the right one for each child.

There are several types of child restraints – baby seats, child seats, booster seats and booster cushions. You must check on the seat description itself that it is suitable for your child's weight. Look for a label with an "E" mark and an approval number starting with '03' or 44.03 (or later numbering, e.g. .04) and the weight range of child for which it is designed. Only very old restraints will have a BS "Kitemark". These cannot be used after May 2008.

Before buying a child restraint, you should try it in your car to make sure it fits properly. Ask for a demonstration. A properly installed restraint fits tightly into the adult seat – push your weight against it while tightening the adult seat belt. The seat belt buckle should not rest on the restraint frame. Beware of old or second-hand restraints which may be damaged or worn out. They may not have proper fitting instructions and may not meet current standards.

Take ample time to fit a child restraint in your car and always follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully. Recent vehicles may have ISOFix attachment points. An ISOFix child restraint is installed using these and not the adult seat belt (although many can be used with adult belts). They are easier and quicker to install accurately and safely. But always check whether a child restraint is suitable for the ISOFix points in your car – some will differ.

Adult belts are best for adults over 150cms (4ft 11ins) or taller. They are not designed for children. The law requires that children under 135cms must use the correct child seat or booster. A booster seat or cushion may not be popular with older children but it puts them in the right position so that they get the maximum protection from the adult belt. It is important to get the belt low across the abdomen from hip bone to hip bone and over the shoulder, away from the neck.