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Money
SECTION B

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By Trevor Kapralos, Observer-Dispatch (Utica, N.Y.)

Safer: Sara Meays of Mid-York Child Care Coordinating Council fits Theresa Mintchev, 5, with a free booster seat in Rome, N.Y.

Autos

Older kids put back in booster seats

New York is the latest of 27 states and the District of Columbia to legislate booster seats for older kids. 5B

Laws put older kids in booster seats

New York becomes 27th state to enact legislation

By Jayne O'Donnell
USA TODAY

With the booster-seat law that took effect in New York last month, 27 states and the District of Columbia now require the safety devices in cars for children ages 4 to at least 6. Nine other states are considering similar legislation.

The laws require parents to put older kids back into child seats, which many children had stopped using. Booster seats are used with adult-size safety belts, making the belts fit children's bodies better. All states require children to be restrained in a child seat until at least age 4.

Flaura Winston, a pediatrician and child passenger safety investigator at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, says surveys of parents whose children were killed or injured in crashes show that starting at age 4, it was often the children themselves who decided where they sat in the car. Nearly all the children who had not been in a booster seat — especially those 7 or older — had made the decision not to be.

"For the parents of the kids in booster seats, safety was non-negotiable," Winston says.

Joseph Colella, a Mount Airy, Md.-based traffic safety consultant, says the new laws make it easier for parents to get their kids back into booster seats.

"It becomes unacceptable for children not to ride in boosters, so the peer pressure factor goes down."

Beginning this week, even parents who transport their kids in some New York City taxis are being encouraged to use boosters. Taxis — a principal mode of travel for parents and kids in some big cities — are exempt from most of the laws, but many cabs in New York City will now provide children's booster seats.

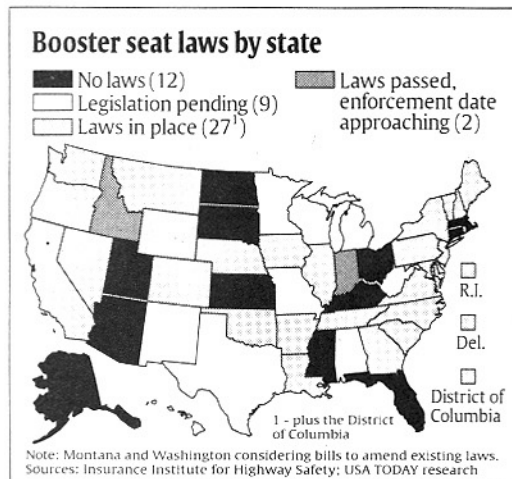
Morgan Stanley Children's Hospital of New York-Presbyterian is spearheading the New York effort to get the message to taxi riders, who will now have access to booster-seat-equipped taxis. Dorel Juvenile Group, makers of Cosco, Safety 1st and Eddie Bauer child seats, donated 300 booster seats to for-hire cabs in New York City. In 2000, the most recent year for which data are available, 2,600 children were injured in 17,000 taxi-related accidents in New York City.

Nearly half the 774 children ages 4-7 who died in car crashes from 1999-2003 were not restrained, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Without booster seats, even children in minor crashes can suffer serious injuries to the neck, spine and abdomen, according to Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.



By Trevor Kapralos, Observer-Dispatch (Utica, N.Y.)

Buckle up: Mid-York Child Care Coordinating Council employee Sara Meays buckles Theresa Mintchev, 5, into a free booster seat. New York enacted legislation March 27 requiring booster seats for children under 7.



Dennis Durbin, a pediatric emergency doctor and the other principal investigator on the Philadelphia hospital's child passenger safety project, says booster seats reduce the risk of serious crash injuries to children ages 4 to 8 by about 60%. Hospital researchers use claims data from State Farm Insurance, which funds the project, to study how and why children are injured or killed in car crashes.

Seven states and the District have laws that require booster seats until kids turn 8; Tennessee and Wyoming require them until age 9. Several other states also have height or weight requirements that could force slightly built older children to continue using booster

seats.

Once older children are educated about the benefits of boosters, Colella says, they're an easier sell.

"On the educational front, a big area that's missed is teaching the children directly," he says. "When children understand the safety benefits, the greater comfort of having the belts fit properly and the benefit of being able to see out the window, a lot of times they will choose to ride in boosters."

There also are more — and cooler — booster seats than ever. Some have headphones; others feature popular characters from cartoons and movies.

The American Academy of Pediatrics' car-seat guide lists 25 available booster seats, from \$15 to \$349, on its website, www.aap.org. There are also some traditional child seats that feature higher weight limits than traditional seats. Durbin says such seats are better because they have five-point harnesses.

Safety belts and booster seats were designed for more common frontal crashes and are less effective in side crashes. "Harness-type child restraints are better able to prevent injury in all directions of impact," Durbin says.

Despite tougher state laws, federal safety officials estimate that the number of children ages 4 to 7 who were restrained in cars dropped from 83% in 2002 to 73% last year.

The good news: More kids — 86% — were sitting in back seats in 2004 than in 2002, when only 71% were in the rear. In the back, they can't be injured by air bags and are at less risk of crash injuries.

Durbin says failing to restrain a child is the worst mistake a parent can make in a car: "The unbelted kids are dying."