PENNSYLVANIA STATE POLICE
COMMUNITY AWARENESS BULLETIN
CAB 06-2016 December 12, 2016

CHILD SAFETY SEATS: A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH

Samantha Swartwout, a 6-year-old girl from Richmond, Virginia was seriously injured in a motor vehicle accident because she was not properly restrained or secured in a booster seat. The child was riding in her father's vehicle with the shoulder strap of the seat belt behind her upper body. When his vehicle veered off the roadway and struck a tree, the seat belt acted like a knife cutting through Samantha's abdomen. After a lengthy hospitalization and multiple surgeries, Samantha is expected to recover but with physical limitations.[1]

The American Automobile Association (AAA) reports that motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death and injury for children. Properly restrained children are less likely to be injured in the event of a sudden stop, swerve, or crash.[2] According to Parenting Magazine, booster seats can decrease serious injuries by 45 percent because they place children in a position so the shoulder portion of the seat belt can actually do its job.[3]

Pennsylvania's primary child passenger safety law (CPSL) requires that children under the age of four must be properly restrained in an approved child safety seat anywhere in the vehicle.[4] Children from ages four up to eight must be restrained in an appropriate booster seat. In June 2016, Pennsylvania enhanced the CPSL by requiring infants and children to be secured in a rear-facing car seat in the rear of the vehicle until the age of two, or until the child outgrows the maximum weight and height limits designated by the car seat manufacturer.[5]

Many parents, especially first-time parents, are concerned about the proper installation of both child safety and booster seats. Across the Commonwealth, child seats can be installed and examined by certified Child Passenger Safety Technicians. All Pennsylvania State Police stations have Troopers trained to perform this service. The safety of your child is as easy as making an appointment at your local station. Other resources are available on the Safe Kids website at www.safekids.org.

Another concern for many parents is the cost of the seats. The average price for an infant safety seat can range between $75 to as much as $300 depending on the manufacturer. However, in many counties across the state, there are loan programs that provide child safety seats to families in need. The programs offer a variety of seats including infant seats, convertible seats, and booster seats. To locate a loan program near you, please visit www.PAkidstravelsafe.org.

---

[1] Holohan, M. (2016, November 1). After daughter sustains major injuires, mom warns about proper car seat use. *Today.com*. Retrieved on 11/02/2016 from http://www.today.com/health/mom-warns-about-car-seat-safety-after-daughter-nearly-sliced-t104541.

[2] AAA. Why are car seats important? *AAA.com*. Retrieved on 11/02/2016 from http://safeseats4kids.aaa.com/faqs/why/why-are-car-seats-important/.

[3] Dreisbach, S. The importance of booster seats. *Parenting.com*. Retrieved on 11/02/2016 from http://www.parenting.com/article/the-importance-of-booster-seats.

[4] 75 Pa.C.S. § 4581

[5] Pennsylvania enacts rear-facing requirement for children younger than age 2 traveling in vehicles. *PAkidstravelsafe.org*. Retrieved on 11/02/2016 from http://www.pakidstravelsafe.org/news-events/news/item/836-pennsylvania-enacts-rear-facing-requirement-for-children-younger-than-age-2-traveling-in-vehicles.