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NEWS RELEASE

Child Passenger Safety

Motor vehicle injuries are the leading cause of death among children in the U.S. But, Kathy Chase, RN of the Otsego County Department of Health says many of these deaths can be prevented. Child safety seats reduce the risk of death in passenger cars by 71 percent for infants and 54 percent for toddlers ages one to four years, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). **Effective November 24, 2009** all children under the age of 8 must be restrained in an appropriate child restraint system while riding in a motor vehicle. An appropriate child restraint system is one that meets the child's size and weight and the specifications of the manufacturer of such system. A child restraint system may be a child safety seat, harness, vest or a booster seat. The vehicle's safety belt alone is **NOT** a child restraint system. The penalty for not having your child in a car seat is a fine of up to \$100 and three penalty points on your driver's license.

Four basic types of child safety seats are available: rear-facing infant seats, designed for infants up to 22 to 35 pounds, depending upon the model; convertible seats, which can be used rear-facing for infants and then "converted" to forward-facing for toddlers; forward-facing only seats, which are designed for toddlers up to 40 to 80 pounds, depending on the model; and belt positioning booster seats, which are used for children who have grown out of the height and weight limits of forward-facing convertible and forward-facing only seats.

Kathy Chase advises that infants face the rear for more than a year. At a minimum, keep infants rear-facing at least until they are one year old and weigh at least 20 pounds or reach the height and weight limit for that particular seat.

A research study conducted by the Center of Applied Biomechanics at the University of Virginia found that one- and two-year-old children were five times safer when riding in rear-facing child safety seats when compared to forward-facing child safety seats. When children outgrow rear-facing child safety seats, they should ride in forward facing safety seats until they reach the upper weight or height limit of the particular seat. Refer to the manufacturer's instructions for the child safety seat.

Many parents wrongly believe that once their child reaches age four or has outgrown his or her forward-facing child safety seat, an adult seat belt offers adequate protection. Using seat belts to secure small children can be dangerous. A seat belt designed for an adult can cut across a child's neck and the shoulder belt can ride up over the stomach, which could cause a serious or fatal injury in a crash. However, a booster seat positions the adult seat belt correctly and safely while offering the child greater comfort and visibility.

All children under the age of 13 should ride in the back seat. Adults should avoid placing children in front of airbags. The impact of the inflated bag could cause serious or even fatal injuries to a child. Putting children in the back seat eliminates the risk of injury from deployed front passenger-side airbags and places children in the safest part of the vehicle in the event of a crash. New York State law requires back seat passengers up to age 16 to be properly restrained when riding in a motor vehicle.

Whatever type of car seat you use, make sure it's installed correctly and that you use it every time your child rides in the car. Refer to the manufacturer's instructions that came with the child safety seat and your vehicle owner manual when installing a child safety seat or booster seat.

A certified child passenger safety technician at the Otsego County Department of Health can provide hands-on educational assistance. Contact the Otsego County Department of Health @ 607-547-4230 if you have questions or need help installing a child safety seat. For more information on child passenger safety, visit the New York State Department of Health web site at http://www.nyhealth.gov/prevention/injury_prevention/booster_seat.htm .

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