

'Nag Me to Click It' to get tweens buckled up

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

Nearly seven out of 10 children, ages 8 to 12, killed in motor vehicle crashes in Colorado since 2004 were not wearing seat belts. That's why Child Passenger Safety (CPS) Team Colorado is launching a new campaign with a goal of getting more of these so-called "tweens" to buckle up and sit in the back seat.

The campaign, called "Nag Me to Click It," aims to encourage parents and caregivers to keep reminding kids to buckle up and not take "no" for an answer. The campaign uses humor by turning the table on parents, with kids taking the role of disciplinarian if parents don't make them wear seat belts.

"As children get older and develop their independence, it's more important than ever to set a good example by buckling up yourself and making sure your kids do too," said Corp. Eric Wynn, Colorado State Patrol. "Parents have more influence than they think.

"In surveys, tweens admit that parents are the ones most likely to get them to wear their seat belt, so help them develop a habit that could save their life by making seat belts non-negotiable. Besides, it's the law, and drivers will be pulled over and ticketed when children are not properly buckled up."

Dr. Todd Porter, a pediatrician with Children's Medical Center agrees that parents play a critical role. "Just as parents are concerned about getting their children immunized against diseases like the H1N1 flu virus, they should be just as concerned with protecting their kids against the number one-killer of children in Colorado—traffic crashes," said Dr. Porter. "Children are particularly susceptible to serious injuries because their bodies and bones are still developing and can't withstand the force of a collision. Children are also safest sitting in the back seat, away from air bags."

Safety experts recommend that children be at least 13 years old before being allowed to sit in the front seat. Between 2004-2008, 18 percent of children under age 13 who died in traffic crashes in Colorado were sitting in the front seat.

Studies by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety and Children's Hospital of Philadelphia

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show that children are 40-48 percent less likely to be fatally injured in the back seat of passenger vehicles. Airbag and vehicle manufactures also recommend children remain in the back seat to be away from the airbag deployment zone.

But simply buckling up and being in the back seat isn't enough. Children need to be in the appropriate child restraint according to their age, height and weight.

For example, not all "tweens" are tall enough to fit an adult seat belt. Safety experts recommend that kids remain in a booster seat until they are at least 4'9" tall, which can typically be anytime between 8 and 11 years old. This is because if the hips are not developed enough, the lap belt can slip up into the soft abdominal area during a crash and can cause very serious abdominal and spinal cord injuries.

To insure that your child is tall enough to fit into vehicle safety belts, all five of the following criteria must be met:

—The child should be able to sit in the vehicle seat with their back and bottom touching the vehicle's seat-back cushion.

—The child's legs should be long enough to be able to comfortably bend at the knees at the edge of the vehicle seat.

—The lap portion of the safety belt should be touching the upper thighs and be low over the hips.

—The shoulder belt should fit across the center of the collarbone and center chest.

—The child should be mature enough to remain correctly positioned in the safety belt at all times.

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“Parents need to make sure their children’s friends are also properly buckled up when they’re giving them a ride. They also need to talk to other parents about making sure their kids are buckled up when riding with others,” said Corp. Wynn. “Parents often lift the rules when carpooling with kids, but most crashes happen on those short trips. Also, make sure kids take off their backpacks before buckling up to make sure the seat belt fits them correctly.

Parents and caregivers can get more information on child passenger safety and Colorado laws by visiting www.NagMeToClickIt.com.