



Media Alert

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MIEMSS Celebrates Child Passenger Safety Week and Announces Updated Booster Law during 'Seat Check' Event at M&T Bank Stadium

This week, September 16 – 22, is National Child Passenger Safety Week. As part of the campaign, drivers with child passengers are encouraged to visit a child safety seat inspection station to have a certified technician inspect their car seat and give hands-on advice. In recognition of Child Passenger Safety Week, the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems (MIEMSS) is holding a press event to bring awareness to the updated Child Passenger Safety law. MIEMSS is the state agency responsible for coordinating Maryland's Trauma and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) System.

The press event will be held **Thursday, September 20, 2012, at 2:00 PM at M&T Bank Stadium, Lot B**, to announce the updated booster seat law that takes effect on October 1, 2012. This event will take place during free car seat safety inspections being held from 1:00 to 4:00 PM. Certified child passenger safety technicians will be checking car seats for proper installation and will advise parents and caregivers how to choose the right car seats and install them properly in their vehicles. The safety seat inspection is hosted by Safe Kids Baltimore, which is led by the University of Maryland Children's Hospital.

Special guest speakers at the press event will be Dr. Rich Lichenstein, University of Maryland Medical Center and Past President of the Maryland Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, and Dr. Cliff Mitchell, Maryland Department of Mental Health and Hygiene/Environmental Health. Also on hand to answer questions from the press and the public will be Susanne Ogaitis-Jones, MIEMSS Child Passenger Safety & Occupant Protection Healthcare Project Coordinator; Cynthia Wright-Johnson, MIEMSS EMS for Children Director and Safe Kids Maryland State Coordinator; Tracy Whitman, Kids In Safety Seats Coordinator, Karen Hardingham, Safe Kids Baltimore Coordinator; and Tim Richards, Maryland Highway Safety Office.

Child Passenger Safety Week comes just a week before updated legislation on child safety in vehicles becomes effective. As of October 1, 2012, Maryland's Child Passenger Safety Law will require that all children younger than 8 years old use a harnessed car seat or booster seat, unless the child stands 4'9" or taller before that age. Also, children up to the age of 16 must be restrained by a seat belt, harnessed car seat, or booster seat in all seating positions of the car. Previously, children weighing more than 65 lbs. were exempt from using car seats; now many booster seats can accommodate children who would not fit a seat belt properly, even those weighing as much as 100-120 lbs. With the new law in place, kids of all ages, shapes, and sizes are better protected against preventable injury.

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Data analyzed by Safe Kids Worldwide indicate that 73% of car seats are not being used correctly. “Correctly used child safety seats can reduce the risk of death by as much as 71%,” said Cynthia Wright-Johnson, Safe Kids Maryland State Coordinator. “Engineers are working hard to ensure cars and car seats are designed to keep kids as safe as possible. But it’s up to every parent to take full advantage of these innovations by making sure car seats are used and installed correctly. Safety steps every parent should take include keeping their children in rear-facing car seats for as long as possible, ideally until age 2; selecting the correct seat for the weight, height or age of the child; tightening the harness enough; and knowing when to let kids ride in the front seat.

Although Maryland law provides guidance to parents and law enforcement officers, Maryland Kids In Safety Seats (KISS) reports that many children are still not ready to use adult seat belts even after reaching the age of 8. In fact, during a crash a child wearing a poorly fitting seat belt is 8 times more likely to sustain abdominal injury than a child who uses a booster seat. "Children should only move out of a booster seat once they are able to correctly fit in adult seat belts," said Tracy Whitman, KISS Coordinator.

To know if the adult seat belt fits properly, KISS recommends the "**Seat Belt Fit Test.**" The seat belt fits correctly when:

- the child can sit all the way back, with his/her knees bent over the vehicle seat
- the lap belt lies across the hips and below the belly
- the shoulder belt is centered across the chest and resting on the collarbone — not across the neck
- the child can stay seated like that the entire ride

For more information about child passenger safety, contact KISS at 800-370-SEAT or www.mdkiss.org. For **healthcare staff trainings or additional materials**, contact MIEMSS CPS Healthcare Program at cps@miemss.org or www.MIEMSS.org/EMSCwww/CPSHome.htm.

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