

Section 4: Seat Belts, Air Bags and Child Safety Seats



Wearing seat belts, also called safety belts, can double your chances of surviving a crash and more than double your chances of avoiding serious injury.

Seat Belts

Under Virginia law, the driver and all front seat passengers must wear safety belts. A driver transporting anyone younger than age 18 must ensure that the passenger is properly secured in a safety belt, booster seat or child safety seat no matter where the child is seated in the vehicle.

Remember to wear your lap belt low on your lap and against your thighs. Wear your shoulder belt over your shoulder and across your chest. Never wear your shoulder belt behind your back or under your arm. Your shoulder and lap belts should be snug without any slack. Pregnant women are much safer if buckled up by wearing the belt as low on the pelvis as possible.

Exception: A waiver of the seat belt requirement may be granted by a licensed physician if the use of a safety belt is not reasonable due to the driver's or passenger's physical or medical condition. The person granted the waiver must carry the physician's signed written statement identifying the person with the waiver and the reason for the waiver.

Air Bags

Air bags, when used properly with safety belts, cushion drivers and passengers as they move forward in a front-end crash. By providing a cushion, the air bag keeps the head, neck and chest from hitting the steering column or dashboard.

In this section you'll learn about:

- ▶ Seat belts
- ▶ Air bags
- ▶ Child safety seats

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If your vehicle is equipped with air bags:

- ▶ Always buckle up and have all passengers in the vehicle buckle up.
- ▶ Move your seat back so that you are at least ten inches from the steering wheel.
- ▶ If your steering wheel is adjustable, tilt it downward. This points the air bag toward your chest instead of your head and neck.
- ▶ Children ages 12 and under are safer buckled up in the back seat.

For more information about air bags, including applying for an on/off switch, contact the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) at www.nhtsa.dot.gov or toll-free hotline at 1-800-424-9393.

Child Safety Seats

Securing a child in a correctly installed child safety seat can significantly reduce the possibility of death or injury.

All children under age eight must be properly secured in a child safety seat or booster seat when riding in vehicles manufactured after January 1, 1968. If the vehicle does not have a back seat, a rear facing child seat may be placed in the front passenger seat only if the vehicle is not equipped with a passenger side airbag or the passenger air bag is turned off. A waiver of this law may be granted by a licensed physician if the use of a child restraint would be unreasonable due to the child's weight, physical fitness or other medical reasons. The person responsible for transporting this child must carry the signed written statement by the physician identifying the child and stating the grounds for the waiver.

The driver is responsible for making sure that children are properly secured. If you are convicted of violating the child restraint law, you will be fined \$50.00. A second or subsequent offense could mean a \$500 penalty.

When traveling with children:

- ▶ Children from birth to age 12 months ride facing the rear.
- ▶ Children ages one through seven ride facing forward in a child safety seat or booster seat.
- ▶ The safest place to install a child safety seat is in the center of the back seat. Never place a rear-facing infant seat in the front seat of a vehicle with a passenger-side air bag turned on.
- ▶ Numerous child safety seat checks are held in localities across Virginia. Attend one of these checks to make sure that your child's safety seat is installed correctly.
- ▶ Never hold a child in your lap. In a crash, the child may be crushed between your body and the dashboard.
- ▶ Make sure that all car doors are securely closed and locked before driving. If your car is equipped with a child safety lock, turn it on. Don't allow children to play with door handles or locks. If you must open a door, pull the vehicle off the road and come to a complete stop.
- ▶ Never allow children to ride in the luggage area of hatchbacks, station wagons or vans.
- ▶ Never leave a hatchback open when a child is riding in the back seat.
- ▶ It is illegal to transport children under age 16 in the bed of a pickup truck, even if equipped with a camper shell.