

Maryland EMS News

For All Emergency Medical Care Providers

Vol. 43, No. 10

November 2017

Safer Travel for Young Families: Planes, Trains, Buses, and Cars

Traveling with younger children for the holidays? Then you know how important advanced planning is to keeping everyone as safe and comfortable as possible, especially if you are using more than one mode of transportation. Travel plans may include a drive to the airport, a flight to another state, and then another drive using for-hire vehicles or local city buses or trains to get around. Each mode has different safety issues, but car travel is statistically the most risky. So keep these tips handy when you travel this holiday season, to keep everyone safe and the trip enjoyable.

For the drive to the airport, the safest thing for young children is for you to buckle them into their own car seat, even if using a for-hire vehicle. If you park at an airport lot, take your car seat with you. If you ride an airport shuttle bus that has no seat belts, make sure that everyone stays seated for the ride; babies can be restrained in front-style backpacks worn by an adult. If seat belts are available, use them for restraining kids in car seats and for larger children or adults.

At the airport, take the car seat inside with you to the gate. Rear-facing-only car seats are easiest to carry around, but kids generally outgrow them around one year of age. Convertible car seats for bigger/older children can sometimes be snapped into strollers or attached to special travel carts, possibly even with the child strapped into it. Consider whether the cart or stroller is going to be gate-checked or if it can fit into an overhead compartment of the plane.

Plan to purchase an airline seat for each child who is traveling. The US Federal Aviation Administration permits children under aged two to ride on an adult's lap, but that is neither safe nor comfortable for the adult or child. In turbulence, an adult could easily lose their grip on a child, putting that child at risk for blunt injuries to the head or other serious trauma.

Children should be protected on airplanes the same as adults are. This means younger children should be buckled into their own car seat, and older children should be secured

using the airplane's lap belt. Anyone old enough to properly wear a seat belt should stay buckled up unless absolutely necessary. Car seat use can also help to limit social problems, such as the child running around the plane or kicking seat backs.

US-based airlines allow rear-facing and forward-facing car seats to be installed onboard, but check with your specific airline ahead of time and follow the flight attendant's instructions while on the plane. Children in car seats must sit next to the window so they do not block the egress of others, and car seats are not permitted in the exit rows.

On large international flights, they may sit in the center section of seating. Car seats requiring a tether are not permitted, nor are booster seats, since they require a lap and shoulder belt. Narrow car seats are more likely to fit on a plane. Check your car seat's labels to see if it is "FAA approved." Using a car seat on an airplane also prevents it from getting damaged in baggage.

At your destination, be sure to install your child's car seat in the rental car or for-hire vehicle. Few rental car companies lend car seats, and there is no guarantee that what they loan you is appropriate for your child or installed correctly. If your child is older than two years, but is not big nor old enough to fit a lap/shoulder belt in a car, make sure you bring their harnessed seat or a booster for them to use on each drive. For any train or bus travel, if seat belts are provided, use them to secure car seats and younger children. Have older kids and adults buckle up on public transportation whenever possible. Jill Dannenfels, RN, BSN, CCRN, NREMT, and mom of three young travelers, says, "I often travel with multiple BumbleBums [inflatable boosters] just to keep the kids safe when we arrive. It is a pain to carry so much extra stuff, but there really isn't much of a choice if you want to be safe."

Traveling with children for a vacation can be challenging, but planning ahead can ward off

There are vest-types of restraint devices marketed for children to use on airplanes, but not all are FAA-approved for use on all stages of the flight. Read the instructions carefully before buying or using one of these devices. The CARES Harness is FAA-approved and is helpful for restraining children, especially those with poor muscle tone or behavioral issues. Note that it cannot be used in a car on the way to/from the airport, so you still need to bring a car seat.



some potential problems. Although parents may initially hesitate to purchase an airline seat for a young traveler and/or lug a car seat along on vacation, the safety benefits and ease of transferring from one mode of travel to another far outweigh the potential inconvenience and expense.



Courtesy: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration