

2 Seat Belts, Safety Seats and Air Bags

Click It or Ticket: Under Michigan’s seat belt and child-safety restraint laws, a law enforcement officer may stop a vehicle if the driver and occupants are not properly buckled up. Please review the information in this chapter and obey these laws.

BUCKLE UP, IT’S THE LAW!

Michigan law requires

- All front seat passengers to be buckled up (including the driver).
- All passengers younger than age 16 to be buckled up, in all seating positions.
- All children younger than age 8 to be in an approved child-safety seat or booster seat, in all seating positions, unless 4 feet and 9 inches or taller.



Photograph courtesy of the Office of Highway Safety Planning

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reports that seat belts save more than 13,000 lives each year and that buckling up is the single most effective thing you can do to protect yourself in a crash.

- Be responsible – make sure all passengers are properly buckled up.
- Even if the vehicle is equipped with air bags, they are not a substitute for wearing a seat belt.
- Everyone in the vehicle will be safer when seat belts are

worn correctly – shoulder belt across the middle of the chest away from the neck, with the lap belt worn low across the hips, below the stomach.

- Drivers exempt from using a seat belt because of a medical condition must carry a doctor’s statement.

PROTECTING CHILDREN AND TEENS

Since the Michigan Child Passenger Protection Law was enacted, use of child restraints and safety belts has increased, while deaths and injuries have decreased.

However, many people use child-restraint devices improperly. Make certain both the child-safety restraint and your child are properly buckled before you drive.

Michigan’s child passenger safety law mandates that:

- Children are to be properly buckled in a car seat or booster seat until they are 8 years old or 4-feet, 9-inches tall. Children must ride in a safety seat until they reach the age requirement or the height requirement, whichever comes first. Children must be properly secured in the child-restraint system in accordance with the child-restraint and vehicle manufacturer’s instructions and federal safety standards.
- Removing a child from a car seat to nurse while the vehicle is moving is prohibited.
- Children younger than age 4 must be positioned in a rear seat if the vehicle is equipped with a rear seat. If all available rear seats are occupied by children under age 4, then the child may be positioned in the child-restraint system in the front seat.
- A child in a rear-facing child-restraint system may only be placed in the front seat if the front passenger air bag is deactivated.
- Young people younger than age 18 are prohibited from riding in the open bed of a pickup truck traveling more than 15 mph. The law allows exceptions for vehicles used by farmers, construction workers, the military, participants in parades and authorized emergency and rescue personnel.

Never hold a child on your lap or buckle a child with another passenger into one seat belt. Always insist children buckle their seat belts before starting the engine.

Assistance with child-safety seat installation is available at many community agencies, such as local public health departments. Avoid buying secondhand seats as they may not meet federal safety standards, may not work properly, or may have missing parts or instructions. And, if there is a recall, you may not receive notification.

AIR BAGS

Air bags are designed to provide vehicle occupants with extra protection in a crash. Depending on the make and model, today's vehicles may have air bags in a variety of locations, including the steering wheel, dashboard, roof columns and door panels. Sensors within the vehicle determine when an air bag will deploy based on the type and severity of the crash. For the best protection always wear a seat belt, even in vehicles equipped with air bags. Seat belts remain the best protection in rollover, side impact and rear-end crashes.

- A child in a rear-facing child-restraint system may be placed in the front seat only if the front passenger air bag is deactivated.
- Parents are encouraged to seat all children ages 12 and younger in the rear seat of the vehicle to avoid potential injury from an air bag in the event of a crash.
- It is recommended that drivers sit with at least 10 inches between the center of their breastbone and the center of the steering wheel.
- If you are pregnant, it is recommended that you wear your seat belt with the lap portion of the belt correctly positioned over the hips (not the stomach) and the shoulder portion across the chest. Sit as far back as possible from the air bag.

CHILDREN LEFT UNATTENDED IN VEHICLES

Under Michigan law, it is illegal to leave children less than 6 years old unattended in a vehicle if the amount of time or circumstances

in which they are left poses an unreasonable risk of harm or injury. Parents or guardians who leave their children in a vehicle under the supervision of someone age 13 or older who is not legally incapacitated are not in violation of the law.

Make sure your children are safe from harm if you must leave your vehicle. And, do not forget about your pets. Pets left alone in vehicles may also suffer injury or harm.

