

Properly installed car seats keep children safe

As a parent of four kids, Community Engagement Deputy Amy Weckman is no stranger to using car seats. She is also a Certified Car Seat Technician and works with parents to make sure they have car seats for their children -- and that they are installed properly.

According to the Office of Traffic Safety (a division of the Minnesota Department of Public Safety), of the 14,692 children ages birth to 7 who were properly restrained in Minnesota crashes from 2017 to 2021, 88 percent were not injured, while another nine percent sustained only minor injuries. Eighty-eight children were seriously injured in motor vehicles during the same time period; of those, only 49 percent were known to be properly secured.

In Minnesota, all children must be in a child restraint until they are 4 feet, 9 inches tall, or at least age 8, whichever comes first. State law has steps for each stage of a child's growth:

- **Rear-facing child seats:** Your child should remain in a rear-facing car seat until he or she reaches the height or weight limit allowed by your car seat's manufacturer. It is safest to keep children rear-facing up to the maximum weight limit of the car seat.
- **Forward-facing seats:** Once your child outgrows the rear-facing car seat, your child is ready to travel in a forward-facing car seat with a harness. Keep your child in a forward-facing car seat until he or she reaches the weight limit of the harness allowed by your car seat's manufacturer.
- **Booster seats:** Use after outgrowing a forward-facing harness restraint. The booster must be used with a lap and shoulder belt. It is recommended to keep a child in a booster seat based on height rather than age.
- **Seat belts:** Buckling up with a seat belt is for children 8 years old or who have reached 4 feet, 9 inches. Use when children can sit with their back against the vehicle seat, knees bent comfortably and completely over the edge without slouching, and feet touching the floor.
- **Back seat is safest:** Children 12 and under should stay in the back seat as long as possible.

Learning the proper use and installation of a car seat is one of the most vital pieces of safety when it



The Scott County Sheriff's Office offers free car seat checks for parents and caretakers. They also have a limited number of car seats available for free for families that meet income requirements.

comes to transporting children. For new parents or anyone whose child has outgrown their current seat, that task can be unnerving and leave guardians wondering where they can go for help.

"You get that initial check from the hospital staff before you leave with your newborn, but as the child gets older and is ready to move on to the next car seat, parents often don't know where to go," said Deputy Weckman. Deputy Weckman often teams up with other certified Car Seat Technicians from neighboring police departments in Scott County to educate parents and caregivers on how to choose and properly install the appropriate seat for their child's age, size, and vehicle so that it can be used correctly every time.

"Child safety seats save hundreds of lives every

year, but using them properly can mean a matter of life and death," said Sheriff Luke Hennen. "Making sure that the seat is correctly installed in your vehicle and rechecking it often -- as it may shift over time and need to be adjusted -- is critical in keeping your child safe." Although it is encouraged to register for a full car seat check, a great place to start is with the following checklist:

- **Anchor the car seat with seat belt or latch.** The seat should allow for no more than one inch of movement.
- **Tighten harness straps and buckle.** The chest clip should be level with the child's armpit.
- **Choose the right seat.** This should be based on your child's height and weight.
- **Remove bulky clothing and jackets.** Place blankets over the top of the child.

The Sheriff's Office has a limited number of car seats available free of charge for families that meet specific income requirements. These car seats are acquired through a grant from the Minnesota Child Passenger Safety Program/Office of Traffic Safety. The Child Safety Seat Grant is primarily funded by collecting fines from individuals cited for illegal or unsafe transportation of a child in a motor vehicle. The Sheriff's Office also receives private donations from the community to purchase infant-sized seats, which are not covered by the grant.

The Scott County Sheriff's Office offers free car seat checks for parents and caretakers. If you're interested in scheduling an appointment, visit the Sheriff's Office website at www.scottcountymn.gov/1756/Car-Seat-Install-Services. If you have any questions about car seat safety or car seat installation or checks, please contact Deputy Weckman at aweckman@co.scott.mn.us or by calling (952) 496-8862.

The Sheriff's Office serves the 10 rural townships of Scott County and the City of Credit River. **If you live within city limits in Scott County, please contact your local police department to schedule an appointment with them.**

If you have questions about car seats or anything else, please contact Scott County Sheriff Luke Hennen by email at LHennen@co.scott.mn.us, by phone at (952) 496-8625, or in person, or visit our website at www.scottcountymn.gov.

Volunteer drivers make a difference for Hop Scott program

Have you heard about *Hop Scott*? This volunteer-based transportation service relies on volunteer drivers to help those in their community that can no longer drive or are without a vehicle. Accessing medical appointments, essential groceries/goods, social gatherings, and other appointments is a challenge for some -- and *Hop Scott!* volunteer drivers are a welcome solution to a common problem in Scott County.

We are seeking volunteer drivers who are willing donate their time by driving others. If you like driving, meeting new people, and helping others in



your hometown community, then *Hop Scott!* needs you! Let's talk! Please contact us at transit@co.scott.mn.us or call (952) 496-8341, option 2.

Want more information about Scott County?

Visit www.scottcountymn.gov/list.aspx to sign up for e-mail and/or text message alerts on everything from County Board and Planning Advisory Commission agendas and minutes to road and transit updates, bid postings, emergency alerts, and much more!

Property owners: Is your homestead status up to date?

Have you purchased or moved into a property in the past year?

Scan the code below or visit ScottCountyMN.gov/2155/Homestead to file a homestead application if you or a qualifying relative occupy the property as a homestead on or before Dec. 31, 2022. This will affect your 2023 property taxes and eligibility for Property Tax Refund.



What is a qualifying relative?

A qualifying relative includes an uncle, aunt, nephew, niece, child, grandchild, sibling, or parent of the owner or owner's spouse.

When do you apply?

You must apply **on or before Dec. 31, 2022**. Once homestead is granted, annual applications are not necessary unless they are requested by the County Assessor.

Contact the assessor by Dec. 31, 2022 if the use of the property you own or occupy as a qualifying relative has changed during the past year.

If you sell, move, or for any reason no longer qualify for the homestead classification, you are required to notify the County Assessor within 30 days of the change in homestead status.

For more information, please scan the QR code to visit our website or merely go to ScottCountyMN.gov/2155/Homestead.