



NEWS RELEASE

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AUGUST IS CHILD SAFETY AWARENESS MONTH

~ Children are precious cargo – motorists must take responsibility to ensure children arrive alive ~

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. – This month, the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles (DHSMV) is reminding motorists to focus on child safety in vehicles as well as on and around Florida roads. DHSMV is partnering with the Florida Department of Children and Families, Florida Department of Education, Florida Department of Health, Florida Sheriffs Association, Florida Police Chiefs Association and the Florida Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics to recognize August 2016 as Child Safety Awareness Month.

“Children are our most precious cargo and it’s critical for all motorists to take extra caution when a child is in or around a motor vehicle, even in your own driveway,” said DHSMV Executive Director Terry L. Rhodes. “In the heat of the Florida summer, when more children will be out on the road preparing for the start of school, it is very important to remember that whether driving through a school zone or taking a family trip, motorists must do everything possible to ensure our children arrive alive.”

Throughout the month of August, the department will be educating the public regarding all aspects of child safety on Florida roads, including: occupant protection and proper seat restraints, not leaving children in hot cars and safety in and around school zones and school buses. Preliminarily in 2015, there were 66,091 crashes in Florida involving children under the age of 18, resulting in 25,992 injuries and 149 fatalities, a 25 percent increase in fatalities from 2013.

DHSMV data shows the following:

	2013	2014	2015*
Crashes involving children <18	56,084	60,659	66,091
Injuries involving children <18	22,578	23,949	25,992
Fatalities involving children <18	120	121	149

*Source: Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles preliminary data as of June 13, 2016

“It is critically important to ensure the safety of our children in vehicles as they travel our state’s roadways. That means properly restraining children according to their age, size and weight,” said Colonel Gene S. Spaulding, Director of the Florida Highway Patrol (FHP). “FHP encourages everyone in the vehicle to buckle up, including passengers in the back seat. Remember, as the caregivers for these young lives, it’s your responsibility to ensure they are safe.”



Preliminary numbers show that in 2015, 1,165 children were injured wearing no safety restraint in a vehicle and law enforcement issued more than 21,000 citations to motorists for not properly securing children in a vehicle. Florida law requires that all drivers and all passengers under the age of 18 wear a safety belt.

More than 200 children under the age of six were injured in crashes not wearing any type of seat restraint. FHP has several members that are car seat certified who can help identify the best child seat to fit a child, can ensure the seat is properly fitted in a car and can check that the seat is being used correctly every time. Starting Friday, August 5, FHP will begin offering free car seat checks and installations for motorists who bring their current car seat to local FHP Troop stations on the first Friday of every month. A full list of locations and contacts to make an appointment can be found on the department [website](#).

The department and its partners are also reminding motorists to never leave a child unattended or unsupervised in a motor vehicle. It is extremely hot, especially during the Florida summer, and leaving a child in a car can result in the child's injury or death.

"We are proud to partner with the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles in Child Safety Awareness Month as many child injuries and deaths reported to the department are preventable through education and awareness," said Florida DCF Secretary Mike Carroll. "This campaign represents one of the most effective ways to protect children, at the community level with neighbors sharing information and looking out for each other."

"Student safety is our top priority," said Education Commissioner Pam Stewart. "As the new school year approaches, it is especially important that we do everything we can to keep children safe, whether they are walking to school, while at the bus stop or riding the school bus. The Department of Education is proud to partner with DHSMV to promote Child Safety Awareness Month."

State Surgeon General and Secretary Dr. Celeste Philip said, "Heat-related tragedies are entirely preventable, and during these summer months when our vehicles trap extreme amounts of heat, I encourage families in Florida to always check on infants and children to ensure they aren't left behind or at risk of these situations."

"One of the goals of the Florida Sheriffs Association is to protect Florida's future through programs focused on the safety of the youth in our state," said Sheriff Jerry L. Demings, President of the Florida Sheriffs Association. "On behalf of our Florida Sheriffs, I fully endorse and support the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicle's Child Safety Awareness campaign this August."

"Every single thing we can do to emphasize child safety to Floridians is critical. Too often, we get calls about tragedies that could be prevented with better awareness," said Winter Park Police Chief Brett Railey, President of the Florida Police Chiefs Association. "Anyone driving with a child in their vehicle should always make sure the child is safely restrained and never - NEVER - leave a child unattended in a vehicle."

"FCAAP is looking forward to working with the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles to help protect children by raising awareness about the proper use of child safety restraints," said Tommy Schechtmen, President of the Florida Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics.



DHSMV offers additional safety tips for parents and all motorists to keep kids safe in and around vehicles:

- Children under age four must be in a car seat and as of January 1, 2015, children age four and five must be in a car seat or booster seat. Drivers will be charged if any passenger under 18 is not properly buckled in.
- Read the car seat's instruction manual and the portion of your vehicle's owner manual when you install a car seat. [Visit a local FHP](#) station to ask a car-seat certified trooper to help install your seat.
- In passenger vehicles, children under the age of 13 should be secured in the rear seat; airbags can injure or kill young children in the front seat. Never place a rear-facing car seat in front of an airbag.
- Be alert and watch for children especially near schools, bus stops, school buses and in school parking lots. Always watch for and obey signals from school crossing guards.
- Never sit on the roadway or the curb while waiting for the school bus; wait in a safe place away from the road.
- Children on bicycles can be unpredictable and can make sudden changes in direction. Be especially careful when children are present in school zones and residential areas.
- Be alert while backing up and designate safe play areas away from vehicles.

Visit the DHSMV's website <https://www.flhsmv.gov/safety-center/vehicle-and-child-safety/child-safety/> for more information and use the hashtag #ChildSafetyFL throughout the month to add and share important child safety information.

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[The Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles](#) provides highway safety and security through excellence in service, education and enforcement. The department is leading the way to a safer Florida through the efficient and professional execution of its core mission: the issuance of driver licenses, vehicle tags and titles and operation of the Florida Highway Patrol. To learn more about DHSMV and the services offered, visit www.flhsmv.gov, follow us on Twitter [@FLHSMV](#) or find us on [Facebook](#). For safe driving tips and techniques, download the official [Florida Driver License Handbook](#).



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