

## **. Buckle Up – New Jersey’s Seat Belt Law**

**Under state law, the driver and all passengers of a passenger vehicle (ie. car, van, pickup truck and SUV) must wear a seatbelt. The failure of a driver, frontseat passenger and children under age 18 to wear a seatbelt is a primary offense. The driver is responsible for all passengers under age 18. Front-seat passengers 18 years of age and over are responsible for themselves. A police officer can stop a motorist solely for a violation of the seat belt law. Under a secondary law, all unbuckled back seat occupants 18 years of age and older, may be issued a summons if the vehicle is stopped for another reason. Motorists with GDL permits or probationary licenses must use seat belts. Additionally, they must require all passengers seated anywhere in the vehicle to use seat belts. (N.J.S.A. 39:3-76.2f, 39:3-13.2a, 39:3-13.4)**

**The exemptions are any passenger vehicle manufactured before July 1, 1966, a passenger vehicle that is not required to be equipped with seat belt systems under federal law and a physical or medical reason, verified in writing by a licensed physician, that makes the motorist or passenger unable to wear a seat belt. (N.J.S.A. 39:3-76.2g)**

**Seat belts can save a life and improve a motorist’s chances of surviving a crash by 60 percent. A motorist’s chances of surviving a collision are three to four times better if he/she is wearing both a seat belt and a shoulder strap. Fastening a seat belt takes only three seconds and reduces the chances of death or serious injury. Seat belts help in many ways, for example:**

- They keep motorists and passengers from being thrown from the vehicle in a collision. If a motorist/passenger is held in place, any injury may be less severe.**
- They slow a body down with the vehicle. If a vehicle hits something, the**

vehicle stops, but the person keeps going at the same speed that the vehicle was moving. Hitting the dashboard or windshield at 30 mph is like falling from the top of a three-story building.

Driver Safety & the Rules of the Road

New Jersey Driver Manual [www.njmvc.gov](http://www.njmvc.gov)

39

- They keep a motorist/passenger from sliding on the seat during sudden stops and turns. Belts and straps also keep a motorist in position so he/she can control the vehicle.

Tips for Seat Belt Use

- Buckle up with both lap and shoulder belts on every trip. (Air bags are supplemental protection devices.)
- Wear the lap belt under the abdomen and low across the hips. The shoulder portion should come over the collar bone, away from the neck, and cross over the breast bone. The shoulder belt in most new vehicles can be adjusted on the side pillar to improve fit.
- Know how to adjust the seat belts and how to release them if motorists/passengers have to quickly get out of the vehicle.
- Buckle up if riding in the backseat; use center seat belts if those seats are used. Seat belts help prevent riders from falling forward.
- Never put more than one person in one belt.

. Car Seats

Traffic accidents are a leading killer of children. When riding in a vehicle, children should be held in place by a restraint system that meets all Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards. Refer to the paragraph on Child Restraint Law.

All child restraint systems built since January 1, 1981, must be designed to pass tough safety tests. These seats carry a label that gives the date of manufacture and reads: "This child restraint system conforms to all applicable Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards."

There are many types and styles of car seats. An infant car seat will protect a baby up to 20 pounds and 26 inches and must be placed in the vehicle facing the rear. A convertible car seat is a larger seat that can be used for an infant or a toddler of up to 40 pounds and 40 inches in height. The seat can be adjusted to a reclining position and placed in the vehicle facing backwards for a baby. When the baby weighs at least 17 pounds and can sit up well without help, the seat can be adjusted to an upright position and placed in the vehicle facing forward.

**Note:** It is preferred that whenever possible, child car safety seats be placed in the backseat. However, if a motorist is riding with a new infant and the vehicle does not have a backseat, move the front seat as far back as possible from the dashboard and make sure the child is buckled properly in the appropriate restraint for his/her height and weight. Never place rear-facing infant safety seats in the front seat of a vehicle with a front passenger-side air bag.

While a convertible seat is designed to be used facing forward once a child has reached at least 17 pounds, an infant seat must never be faced forward. To do so would be very dangerous. Always check the label on a car seat to find out the size and weight of the child the seat is designed to protect.

Using the car seat every time a child rides in the vehicle - and using it correctly each time - is very important for the safety of the child. Always read the instructions that come with the seat and follow them very carefully. Correct use of the car seat is the best protection a motorist can offer a child. For more

information on child car seats, contact the Division of Highway Traffic Safety at (800) 422-3750 or visit [www.njsaferoads.com](http://www.njsaferoads.com).

#### . Child Restraint Law

The New Jersey child passenger safety law (N.J.S.A 39:3-76.2a) states:

- Children up to age eight or a weight of 80 pounds must ride in a federally approved safety or booster seat in the rear seat of the vehicle. If there is no rear seat, the child must sit in the front seat secured by a safety or booster seat.
- Children under age eight and over 80 pounds must be in a rear seat and use a seat belt. If there is no rear seat, the child must be properly belted in the front seat.
- Failure to comply with this law could mean a \$54 fine and court costs.

#### . Air Bags

Air bags are standard equipment in almost all new vehicles and are designed to supplement seat belts in frontal crashes. Federal safety standards required that manufacturers equip all new passenger cars and light trucks with air bags by 1999. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, statistics show that between 1986 and 2000, front air bags saved the lives of 5,303 front- seat riders.

Driver Safety & the Rules of the Road

New Jersey Driver Manual [www.njmvc.gov](http://www.njmvc.gov)

41

Air bags inflate at speeds of up to 200 mph to protect adults in a front-end collision. An average-sized adult who is correctly belted is not likely to come in contact with the air bag until it is fully inflated.

When air bags are combined with lap/shoulder seat belts, they have saved many adult lives and prevented many injuries in motor vehicle crashes. However, air bags could seriously injure or kill children who are sitting in the front seat.

In 1995, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) allowed cutoff switches in pickup trucks, sports cars and autos with no backseat. In January 1998, it allowed repair shops and dealers to install the switches in vehicles after the appropriate application was made for people in these categories:

- **Driver-and passenger-side air bags:** For individuals with medical conditions when the risks of a deploying air bag exceed the risks of impacting the steering wheel, dashboard or windshield.
- **Driver-side air bags only:** For individuals who cannot properly operate the vehicle and keep at least 10 inches between the center of the steering wheel and the center of the breastbone.
- **Passenger-side air bags only:** For individuals who must place infants in the front seat because the vehicle has no rear seat (e.g., a pickup truck) or the rear seat is too small to hold the child's rear-facing seat, or the motorist must monitor the child's medical condition; for individuals who must place children, 1 to 12 years old, in the front seat because the vehicle has no rear seat, or because the individual must transport more children than can be seated in the rear seat, or because the motorist must monitor the child's medical condition.

For more information about an air bag on-off switch or for an application to request one, call NHTSA's toll-free Auto Safety Hotline at (800) 424-9393.

Information is also available online at [www.nhtsa.gov](http://www.nhtsa.gov).

Children of any age are safest when they are belted properly in the backseat of

a vehicle, especially when the vehicle is equipped with a passenger-side air bag.

Other safety points are:

- Always put an infant in a rear-facing infant child safety seat in the back seat of a vehicle with air bags.
- Always be sure that children 12 years old and younger ride in the backseat of the vehicle.
- Always make sure everyone is buckled up.

A motorist can tell if his/her vehicle has an air bag by the words "air bag" or the letters "SRS" (supplemental restraint system) or "SIR" (supplemental inflatable restraint) on the steering wheel and dashboard panel. Manufacturers also may mark the sun visors or the sides of the open door frame with warning labels or enter a warning in the vehicle owner's manual.