

A Progress Report: Child Passenger Safety in Kansas

August 20, 2008



Where Have We Been?

Over the past three years, Kansas has made significant progress toward improving the health and well-being of our next generation by updating two of three key child passenger safety policies.

BOOSTER SEATS

The Kansas Legislature approved a booster seat policy (HB 2611) in 2006. This legislation took into account the fact that adult safety belts are not designed to fit younger children and, therefore, do not properly protect children in the event of a car crash. Based upon guidelines from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the Legislature implemented a comprehensive policy that informs parents about the need for children ages 4 through 7 — who are over 40 lbs. and under 4'9" — to be restrained with a booster seat. At the time of passage, 34 other states had booster seat policies in place.

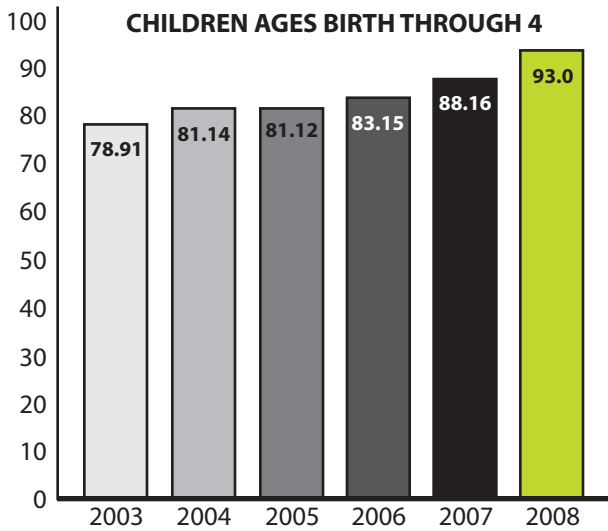
TEEN SEAT BELTS

In 2007, the Kansas Legislature continued its commitment to child passenger safety by approving a primary teen seat belt policy (SB 211). This policy, based upon results achieved in other states, permits law enforcement officials to stop and issue citations to unbelted teen drivers or teen passengers without the requirement of a second infraction. Our state's teen seat belt policy officially went into effect last month.

GRADUATED DRIVERS LICENSING

The Legislature first considered a comprehensive graduated drivers licensing policy (SB 294) in 2007 and again in 2008. During both Sessions, the proposal was approved by the Senate, but was not brought before the full House for consideration. Strengthening our graduated drivers licensing policy would update the state's current licensing system in a way that would provide teens with more driving experience prior to earning an unrestricted license. GDL policies that have most effectively reduced injuries and deaths in other states include a limitation on the number of teen passengers riding with a teen driver and a limitation on late-night driving. To date, 40 other states have implemented a graduated drivers licensing policy that includes both of these components.

Where Do We Stand Today?



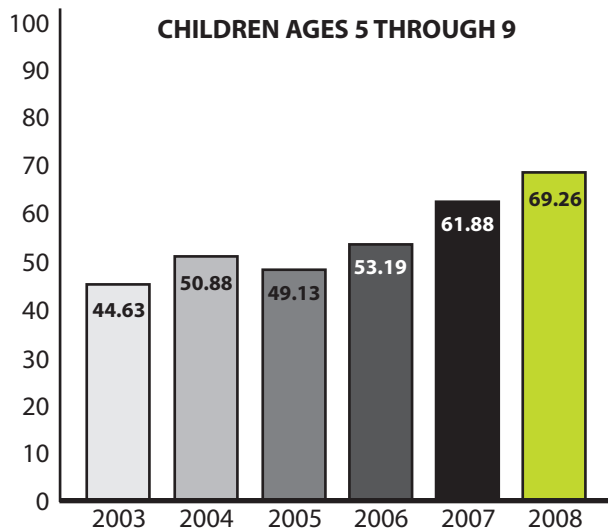
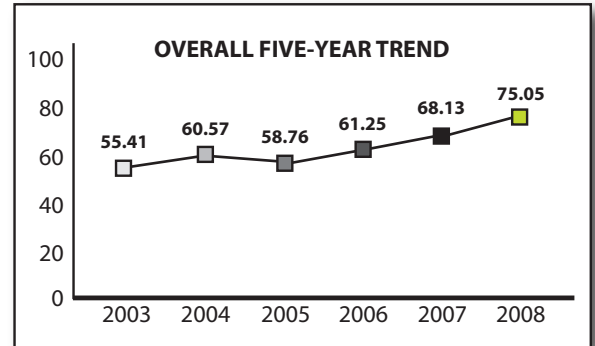
Summary of Results

There has been a steady increase in the use of child safety seats and safety belts in Kansas, according to the newly-released Kansas Child

Occupant Protection Observational Survey. In the past year, use of child safety restraints has **increased**

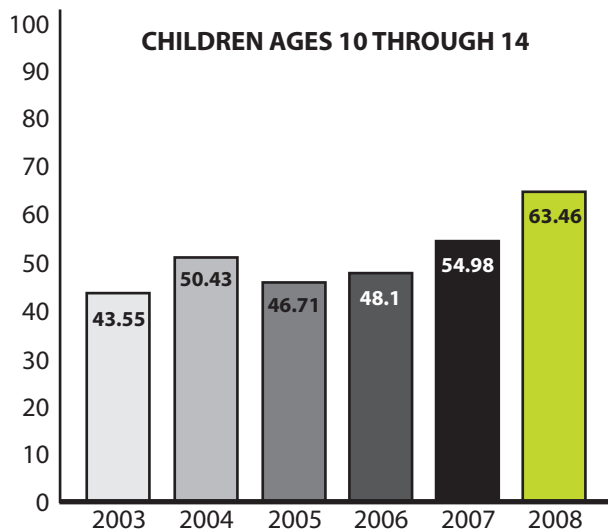
from 68% to

75%. Over the past five years, use has **increased from roughly 55% (2002-2003) to 75% (2007-2008).**



The rate of safety belt **use for children in the 0-4 age group has traditionally been higher** than use among children in the 5-9 and 10-14 age groups. However, all three age groups showed an increase in safety belt use during the 2007-2008 survey year.

In general, **children in urban counties are buckled up at a higher rate than in rural counties.** Among the 20 counties observed in the survey, Reno County children were buckled at the highest rate (89%), while children in Montgomery County were buckled at the lowest rate (49%).



About the Survey

The Kansas Child Occupant Protection Observational Survey is commissioned annually by the Kansas Department of Transportation. In the 2007-2008 survey, slightly more than 19,000 Kansas children were observed. The child survey includes the same 20, randomly-selected counties that are observed in the annual adult survey.

Addition of 15- to 17-Year-Old Age Group

In prior years, three age groups were observed in the child survey — 0-4, 5-9, and 10-14. With this year's survey, an additional age group (15-17) was added due to the state's passage of a primary teen seat belt policy. First-year numbers for this age group are included in the supplemental portion of the survey, however, they are not included in the statewide estimate. Data regarding the 15-17 age group will be added to the statewide estimate next year when two years of data will have accumulated.

Collection Methods

Data for the Child Occupant Survey was obtained through 398 observation sites in the 20 selected counties. Observational sites included neighborhoods where children of these age groups are likely to be, such as vicinities of grocery and general-purpose stores, child care and preschool areas, elementary school neighborhoods, middle school/junior high neighborhoods, and high school neighborhoods.

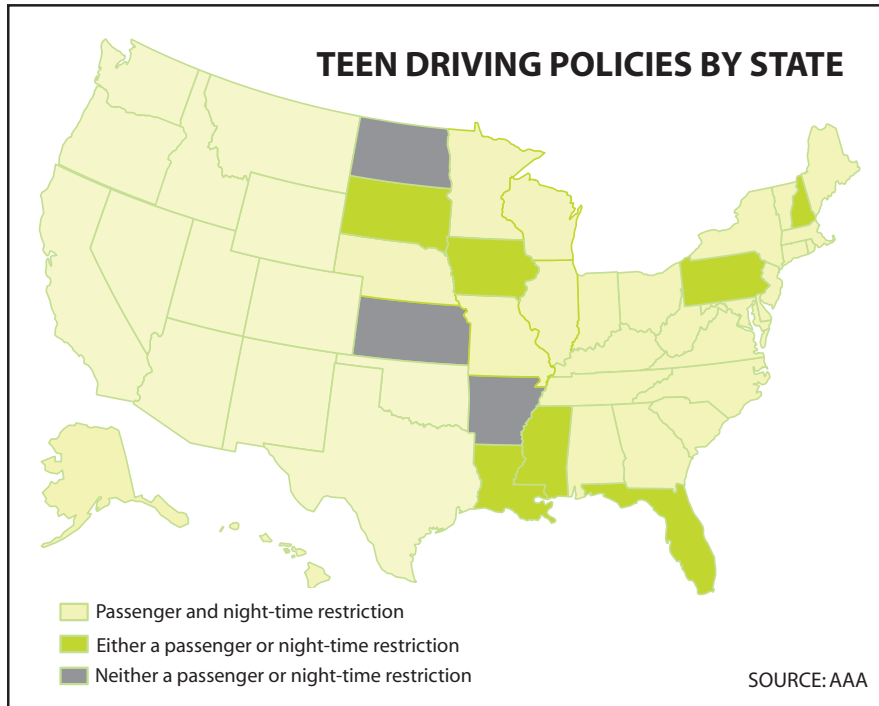
Where Do We Go From Here?

There's a critical opportunity to address another outdated component of our child passenger safety policies — our drivers licensing system. Right now, Kansas is lagging behind other states in efforts to properly prepare teens for the responsibility of driving. By approving a comprehensive GDL system, Kansas can bring its licensing policy up to speed.

Modern driving conditions require a modern licensing system.

Driving conditions have changed over the past 20 years. Speed limits have increased, cars are more powerful and Kansans spend twice as much time on the road as they did just two decades ago. But, one thing hasn't changed — our driver's

licensing system. Our current system is outdated and, as a result, is failing to properly prepare teens to become lifelong responsible drivers. Kansas is among only a handful of states that have not yet implemented a modern drivers licensing system. In a June 2008 comparison of teen driving policies by AAA, **40 states have implemented both a night-time and passenger restriction for teen drivers** and seven states have instituted either a passenger or night-time restriction.



Car crashes are the No. 1 cause of death among Kansas teens.

Kansas teens are over-represented in car crashes. While teens make up only 6% of our driving population, they account for 20% of all crashes. That's because **the part of the brain responsible for decision-making, problem-solving and**

understanding future consequences — all critical skills for drivers — is still developing during the early teen years.

A GDL policy that will be proposed for the 2009 Legislative Session takes the latest research on brain development into account by requiring that teens gain more driving experience before they assume full driving responsibility.

A comprehensive GDL policy will result in the greatest reduction of fatal crashes.

The two greatest risks to teens are unsupervised late-night driving and having multiple passengers in the vehicle. In fact, **teens are twice as likely to die in a car crash during night-time hours.** The risk of death among teen drivers more than doubles when there are two passengers in the vehicle and more than triples when there are three passengers. Studies have shown that a comprehensive GDL policy — which is one that addresses both late-night driving and multiple passengers — will be most effective in reducing the number of injuries and deaths.

A graduated drivers licensing policy would mean safer roads, reduced medical costs for all of us.

Every year, approximately 7,000 Kansans are injured in car crashes that involve a teen driver. That's equivalent to the entire student body at Pittsburg State University. Another 80 Kansans are killed every year in car crashes that involve a teen driver. Other states have seen up to a **20 percent decrease in crash-related deaths** following implementation of a comprehensive GDL policy. And, fewer crashes mean fewer medical costs. Research tells us that **almost 85% of all medical costs for crash victims fall on society.** Nationally, employers spend \$9 billion in health care costs per year due to crash injuries.

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***The complete 2007-2008 Kansas Child Occupant Protection
Observational Survey is included on CD with this media packet.***