

6 Safety Belts, Safety Seats, and Air Bags

Click It or Ticket: Michigan requires all drivers and passengers to be properly buckled up. Under the law, a law enforcement officer may stop a vehicle and ticket the driver if the occupants are not properly buckled up. Please review the information in this section and obey Michigan’s safety belt and child-safety restraint laws.

Buckle Up — It’s the Law!

In a motor vehicle crash safety belts keep people in their seats, reducing the risk of serious injury and death. By law, everyone in the front seat of a motor vehicle must wear a safety belt. Children under age 16 must be buckled up regardless of where they are seated. 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 safety belt. By wearing a properly adjusted safety belt—over the shoulder with no slack and low across the hips—everyone will be safer.

- Being thrown from a vehicle because you were not wearing a safety belt greatly increases your chances of dying in a traffic crash. Wearing a lap-shoulder belt reduces chances of serious injury by 70 percent and death by 50 percent.
- If you are pregnant, you and your unborn child are much safer when a safety belt is worn low across the hips. By protecting yourself from injury, your unborn child is also protected.
- The chances of being knocked unconscious or seriously injured are much less when wearing a safety belt. If there is danger from fire or water, escape can quickly be made. If the vehicle skids out of control, you will remain behind the wheel and have a better chance of regaining control. Drivers exempt from using a safety 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.

Law Sets Special Requirements

- Children under the age of four must be in approved safety seats, wherever they are seated. For children less than 20 pounds, the child or infant seat must face the rear of the vehicle, according to the standard in the Code of Federal Regulations. However, rear-facing infant seats should never be placed in the front passenger seat of a vehicle equipped with air bags. Inflating air bags can seriously injure or suffocate the child. The safest place for a child in a passenger vehicle is in the middle of the back seat, properly buckled.
- Children 4 years of age or more but less than 16 years of age must be protected by a safety belt in the front or back seat.
- Until children are 8 years old or 4 feet, 9 inches tall, they must be in either a properly fitting child safety seat or booster seat.
- The driver and all front seat passengers must wear a safety belt.
- Young people under age 18 cannot ride 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, in parades, and by authorized emergency and rescue personnel.
- Never hold a child on your lap or buckle a child with another passenger into one safety belt.
- Always insist children buckle their safety belts before starting the engine.

- Wear the safety belt properly, snug and low across the hips.
- Install and use safety seats according to the manufacturer's instructions found in the owner's manual.

Approved safety seats are available at low or no cost 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

New vehicles have air bags to provide vehicle occupants extra protection in a crash. Air bags are stored in the steering wheel or dashboard and inflate during a serious crash, usually a frontal crash that occurs at over 10 mph. In one-tenth of a second, the air bag inflates to provide a protective cushion between the person and the steering wheel, dashboard, and windshield. For the best protection always wear a safety belt, even in vehicles equipped with air bags. Safety belts remain the best protection in rollover, side impact, and rear-end crashes.

- Parents are cautioned never to put a child in a rear-facing infant seat in the front passenger seat of a vehicle equipped with an air bag. If the air bag deploys, the blow to the back of the safety seat could hurt the child.
- Parents are encouraged to seat all children age 12 and under in the rear seat of the vehicle to avoid potential injury from an air bag in the event of a crash.

