

**News Release  
For Immediate Release**

**Baby It's Cold Outside!  
Beware that Bulky Coats and Car Seats Do Not Mix**

While January is officially the coldest month in Texas, February is not far behind, and we just need to look back to last year to see our record blizzard in Texas occurred in February. As parents bundle up their children to protect them from the cold, it is also a good time to think about protecting them from injury in vehicle crashes. The two important considerations to keep your child safe in a crash are that your child is secure in the harness and the car seat is securely attached to the vehicle. One thing that parents often do not take into consideration is that heavy jackets can interfere with keeping children safe and snug in car seats.

The problem is that the bulk from a heavy jacket will be compressed in a crash or even a sudden stop and introduce slack into the harness system allowing the child to move. So, even though it may appear that the harness straps are snug, when the material from the jacket is flattened out it can leave 2-4 inches of looseness in the harness. That looseness will give room for the child to move within the harness system potentially causing injury and in a worst-case scenario even allow the child to be ejected from the harness.

What can a parent do to keep their child warm, yet still make sure the harness system is snug? Fortunately, there are some solutions including dressing the child in thin layers and prewarming the car. The bulky jacket can also be put on backwards on the child over the harness straps or a blanket can be used over the harness straps. There are even some coats and jackets that are specially designed for use with a car seat and do not interfere with the harness system.

Although parents always want to protect their children, studies show that nationally, nearly 2 out of 3 car seats are not used correctly. For a car seat to best protect your child, it must be the right seat for your child's age, weight, height, and developmental stage, and must fit properly in your vehicle while being installed correctly and securely.

Children are at greater risk than adults in a vehicle crash. In fact, motor vehicle crashes are one of the leading causes of death for children 14 and under. Seat belts and car seats are the single most effective tool in reducing these deaths and injuries.

That's why Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Family and Community Health Educator Kay Rogers, Dallam & Hartley Counties reminds all parents and caregivers to secure children properly on every trip including making sure that heavy jackets are not worn when the child is placed in a car seat. To make sure you are using your car seat correctly get a free car seat inspection by searching for a local technician at <https://buckleup.tamu.edu>.

Follow these guidelines from American Academy of Pediatrics to keep your children riding safely:

- **Infants and Toddlers – Rear-facing Only and Convertible Seats**  
All infants and toddlers should ride in a rear-facing seat until they reach the highest weight or height allowed by their car seat manufacturer. Most convertible seats have limits that will allow children to ride rear facing for 2 years or more.
- **Toddlers and Pre-schoolers – Convertible or Forward-facing Seat with a Harness Seats**  
Children who have outgrown the rear-facing weight or height limit for their rear-

facing convertible seat should use a forward-facing seat with a harness for as long as possible, up to the highest weight or height allowed by the car seat manufacturer.

- **School-age Children- Booster Seats**

Children whose weight or height exceeds the forward-facing limit for their harnessed car seat should use a belt-positioning booster seat until the vehicle seat belt fits properly — typically this is between the ages of 8-12 years old.

- **Older Children – Seat Belts**

When children are old enough and large enough to use the vehicle seat belt alone, they should always use lap and shoulder seat belts for the best protection.

**Remember:** All child passengers under age 13 should ride securely restrained in the back seat, where they are safest every trip, every time!