

## **Montgomery County Fire Rescue Service (MCFRS) Frequently Asked Questions regarding Child Passenger Safety:**

- **What is Montgomery County's law regarding car seat use?** Montgomery County does not have its own car seat law. We are included under the Maryland law which states that children must ride in a child restraint system until they are at least eight years old, unless they are over four feet nine inches tall or over 65 pounds. Most children will reach their eighth birthday before they reach the height and weight exceptions. All of our surrounding states: DC, WV, NJ, PA, DE, NC and VA also have laws requiring car seat use until 8 years old. The Maryland law states that the child restraint has to be federally approved and used correctly. Booster seats are considered child restraints, as well as infant seats, convertible seats and forward-facing seats.
- **What do I do if I need help getting a car seat for free?** If you live in Montgomery County and qualify, there is a voucher program that will provide a car seat for your child for \$20.00. Call Brenda Botchway at 240-777-1462 to answer any questions regarding eligibility. Once you have a voucher for a car seat, MCFRS will teach you how to install and use it properly at a car seat appointment.
- **When can my child ride in a car and just use the seat belts?** Most children are between 8 to 12 years old before they can safely ride in just a seat belt alone, unless they are 4 feet 9 inches tall. Click on <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/content/fire/rescue/sion/carsafetyseatcheck/docs/5Stepetest.pdf> to see if your child properly fits in a seat belt. When a child can safely ride with just a lap and shoulder belt depends on the vehicle. It is not uncommon for children to be able to ride safely in one family vehicle with the seat belt and not in another one.
- **When is my child allowed to ride in the front seat of my car?** Maryland's law does not state a child can't ride in the front seat (except for rear-facing infants in a car with active airbags—this is against instructions, very dangerous and illegal), however, it is strongly recommended by all safety experts that children ride in the back seat until they are teenagers. Age 12 and under should ride in the back seat. Children are 40% less likely to be seriously injured or killed in the back seat than the front seat.
- **When should I turn my child forward-facing?** Children should ride rear facing as long as possible, usually up to at least 18 to 24 months. Infant-only seats usually are rated for use up to 22 pounds and convertible seats can be used rear facing up to 30 to 35 pounds. The longer a child rides rear facing the safer they are.

- **How soon can my child use a booster seat?** Children should not ride in a booster seat until they are over 35 to 40 pounds and behave well enough to sit still in a booster seat with a lap-shoulder belt. Generally, children are at least 3 to 4 years old before they should ride in a booster seat.
- **How does one get certified to be a car seat technician?** In order to become a certified technician one must successfully complete a NHTSA standardized certification class that lasts approximately four days. Contact the program manager at 240-777-2467 for information about upcoming classes in Montgomery County. Classes are held every other month.
- **Will MCFRS come to my school/church/Day Care Center and organize a car seat check?** MCFRS conducts car seat checks eighteen hours a week among three different locations. Due to limited availability of certified technicians at other times, it is not usually possible to come to additional sites. Contact the program manager if you have specific requests.
- **Why is there a wait for a car seat appointment?** It is not unusual for MCFRS to receive fifty or more calls in a single day requesting a car seat appointment. With the available technicians we can only schedule approximately 500 appointments each month. We make every effort to return your calls and meet your appointment needs as promptly as possible. We schedule appointments three weekdays and one evening each week, as well as three Saturdays a month.
- **What do I do if I need an appointment right away and there are none available for a week or more?** All car seats come with instruction manuals, as well as toll free numbers to reach the manufacturer. If you read and follow the instructions you should be able to safely use the seat until the next appointment is available. Call the MCFRS car seat hotline number (240-777-2222) to find other locations in the area that check car seats.
- **Is there anything special I need to know if I have a premature or smaller baby?** It is important to read the weight and height requirements on your infant seat. Some infant seats are rated for use from 4 to 22 pounds and others require a child to be at least 5 pounds. If you are anticipating a smaller newborn, get one of the car seats rated for use starting at 4 pounds. Sometimes newborns have a medical need to lie flat. If this is the case, your physician will suggest using a car bed. MCFRS has a supply of car beds for loaner use when this is necessary.