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Important Change to Car Seat Law Effective January 1st

San Bernardino: Beginning January 1, 2012, California law will require children riding in any vehicle to be buckled into a car seat or booster seat in the back seat of the vehicle until their 8th birthday.

In addition, children who are not tall enough, less than 4 feet 9 inches in height, for the seat belt to fit properly must ride in a booster seat. The previous law required that children remain in a booster seat until the age of six or until they weighed sixty pounds.

This change in the car seat law will impact all small children in San Bernardino County. Keeping children in booster seats increases their chance of surviving a car crash by 45 percent. The American Academy of Pediatrics also recommends that young children ride in booster seats until 8 years of age for best protection.

The fine for violating this law is significant. For each child less than 16 years of age who is not properly secured, parents, or the driver of the car, can be fined a minimum of \$475 and get a point on their driving record.

Most young children are too small for seat belts that are made to fit adults, and are subject to severe injury or death if improperly restrained. A booster seat “boosts” the child up in order to make the adult-sized seat belt safely fit a child-sized body. A seat belt worn incorrectly puts a small child at risk of serious internal injury if involved in a crash. If parents observe that their child is placing the shoulder seat belt behind their back, this is a sign that the seat belt does not fit correctly and a booster seat is needed.

Parents can learn more about the law and car seat safety by attending a free car seat safety class. Classes are offered each month in English and in Spanish in the City of San Bernardino to educate parents on the laws and the proper installation of car seats. Parents may also purchase a car seat at low-cost should their child need a car seat. For more information, contact the County of San Bernardino, Department of Public Health, Car Seat Safety Program at 1(800) 782-4264.

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