



GUIDELINES FOR PHYSICIANS

OCCUPANT RESTRAINT REQUIREMENTS

Child specific requirements are as follows:

- Rear-facing infant restraint system until 1 year old and 9 kg
- Forward-facing child restraint system until at least 18 kg (1-4½ years old)
- Booster seat until 9 years of age or 145 cm tall

Children with special needs or mobility impairment who are unable to use conventional car seats may be secured in a restraint system designed for children with special needs (e.g., car bed, safety vest or custom restraint system).

ALL OTHER MOTOR VEHICLE OCCUPANTS MUST BE SECURED IN A SEAT BELT.

GRANTING EXEMPTIONS

Physicians are empowered to issue certificates of exemption from use of a seat belt or child restraint, including a seat belt or child restraint designed for a child with special needs or mobility impairment, for a child up to and including age 8 that will be valid for a specified period or until the child's ninth birthday. Once the child reaches the age of nine, no further exemptions can be issued and existing exemption certificates become invalid. These exemptions should only be issued where a seat belt or child restraint designed for a child with special needs or mobility impairment will not be sufficient to accommodate the child's special needs.

By issuing this certificate, you are indicating that you agree that use of a seat belt or child restraint system, including those designed for children with special needs, is impossible or potentially harmful for the patient named on the reverse because of his or her physical condition or medical problem. In issuing this certificate you must consider that a child who does not use a seat belt or child restraint system may sustain worse injuries if he or she is in a motor vehicle collision.

Because the benefits of using seat belts and child seats are well documented, a physician should carefully consider the advantages of reduced risk of injury or death to the patient, compared to the medical or physical reason the patient is seeking an exemption. Requests for exemptions provide an opportunity for physicians to reinforce passenger safety and health promotion messages and to advise on restraints that may be available for children with special needs.

A physician who grants medical exemption from seat belt or child safety seat use may be called upon to defend the exemption in court, including a lawsuit brought by or on behalf of an injured party.

SEAT BELTS

In considering the merit of granting a seat belt exemption, physicians are reminded that the Canadian Medical Association *Determining Medical Fitness to Operate Motor Vehicles* states, "There are no medical circumstances that justify exemption from wearing a seat belt." In most cases, requests for seat belt exemptions are based on a lack of understanding for how a seat belt can be adjusted. For children who are uncomfortable wearing a seat belt, the driver should be encouraged to:

- adapt the vehicle's restraint system to the child's condition, such as adjusting the position and height of the car's seat, and adjusting and positioning the seat belt
- use devices, such as belt extenders, adjustable seats, adjustable seat belts and padding, to make the seat belt more comfortable.

CHILD RESTRAINTS

Information on transporting children with special needs in personal vehicles and the types of children's restraint systems currently available in Canada can be found in a Transport Canada publication entitled, *Transporting Infants and Children with Special Needs in Personal Vehicles: A Best Practices Guide for Healthcare Practitioners*.

Child safety seat exemptions may be granted in the rare instance when a child does not fit within the specifications of any manufactured child restraint system that is available for purchase. For example, the weight of a child who is under 9 years old and under 145 cm tall may exceed the upper weight limit of any booster seat available on the market (54 kg). If an exemption is granted for this reason, the child is still required to wear a seat belt.