

PROJECT FACT SHEET

What We Don't Know About Traveling With Children

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Dr. Natalie Yanchar discovered that some knowledge about childhood motor vehicle restraints was missing in the province, but also, what was known, was not always being applied. Her telephone survey concluded that new legislation was required to ensure the protection of young Nova Scotian lives. That legislation is now in place.

Researcher shows that children come in four sizes and age groups when they're traveling in a car. For each stage of a child's development, there is an appropriate safety restraint: a rear-facing car seat, a forward-facing car seat, a booster seat, and a seatbelt.

Natalie Yanchar discovered, however, that knowledge has not translated into practice, especially when it came to booster seats. The Medical Director of the Trauma Program at the IWK Health Centre and Assistant Professor in Pediatric General Surgery at Dalhousie University designed a study to discover what drivers in households with children knew about childhood restraints, and if they were following safe practices.

With funding from the NSHRF, Dr. Yanchar carried out a province-wide population-based telephone survey of households with children under 12 years old. Parents were asked about their current use of childhood safety restraints and about their knowledge of current recommendations.

"We found that a significant percentage of Nova Scotian infants are graduated too early from a rear-facing to a forward-facing car seat," says Dr. Yanchar:

"People seem unaware about current recommendations and knowledge about child safety," she adds. "Even when caregivers know about guidelines, they often misjudge the size of their child passengers."

Particularly noteworthy was the non-use of booster seats. Dr. Yanchar found that 50% of children that should in booster seats were not. In addition, over 20% of parents with children who should be in a booster seat and who demonstrated good knowledge of booster seats, were not using them.

"Some of the discrepancies between knowledge and practice are undoubtedly the result of outdated legislation regarding child-passenger safety restraints," says Dr. Yanchar.

As a result of Dr. Yanchar's research, Nova Scotia has become the third province in Canada to adopt booster seat legislation, and now bases its updated regulations about use of rear-facing and forward-facing car seat, booster seats and seat belts on weight and age of a child.

"If we are more responsible about buckling up our children," says Dr. Yanchar, "we can reduce injuries, save lives and save health-care dollars."

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