

## Child Passenger Safety Week

Child Passenger Safety Forum • James C. Owens, Acting Administrator

**Thursday, September 19, 2019 | Washington, DC**

Hello everyone. Thank you for coming.

I'm James Owens, Acting Administrator for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

You've had a productive morning and I'm especially grateful to U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao for her support and leadership on the issue of Child Passenger Safety and for encouraging us to hold this event.

I'd like to thank our panelists for their insight, as well as GM and Kia for providing vehicles for a demonstration of child-detection technology this afternoon as soon as we wrap up in here.

Thank you also to Lorraine Martin and Torine Creppy for their collaborative spirit and for their opening remarks.

As mentioned, I'm in my first month on the job at NHTSA and I am thrilled to be here. NHTSA is a great organization and the nation's premier safety agency. Our mission is simple—safety—and I am really lucky to be in a position to work with such amazing and dedicated experts as we advance safety on our highways and in our vehicles.

Today's topic hits especially close to home—the safety of our children in and around cars. As the father of two young kids, my heart beats a little faster every time we strap them into their car seats. Fortunately, my 3-year old always reminds me to “Buckle up, no excuses.”

As you know, this weekend is National Seat Check Saturday. I'm having my car double-checked by an expert and I hope you will too.

And it's not just the car seats. My oldest is at the stage where the world is his oyster. My wife and I second guess ourselves when we're home—did we lock the car? Can he figure out a way into it?

I know each of you feels very strongly that we need to do all we can to ensure the safety of children in our vehicles. Thank you for the work you do.

You've heard today about our public education efforts in both car seat safety and heatstroke. We are dedicated to that effort, and to keeping our kids safe.

On the topic of heatstroke, we are pleased that individual automakers will be installing electronic alerts in nearly all new vehicles sold in the U.S. by 2025 to remind caregivers not to accidentally leave children behind in the back seat. We applaud those automakers who will be putting these devices in their cars to help families across the nation.

To help the public keep track of what's happening, NHTSA plans to open up a docket to collect and publish information on automakers' efforts. One of NHTSA's great strengths is that we can serve as a bully pulpit, and under my watch we will continue to be an information clearinghouse to help families as they consider their next car. As a parent, I'll certainly want one of these devices in my family's next car.

And we're not stopping there. NHTSA has already assessed a number of technologies intended to help prevent vehicular heatstroke, particularly aftermarket products for child seats, and plans to assess vehicle-based occupant detection and notification systems next. We have developed preliminary performance assessment procedures, and have shared them with our stakeholders. As automakers develop new approaches and technologies for their vehicles, we will continue to monitor and evaluate the systems as they become available. Working cooperatively with our stakeholders on awareness and new technologies, we can help families avoid terrible tragedies.

We're also continuing to educate the public. Over the next year, we'll be working with outside organizations to get child reminder signs placed in parking lots and garages of government facilities, major retailers, and other businesses, to reinforce the message to caregivers to always, always double-check backseats when exiting their vehicles

We will continue to push that message, and today I'm pleased to announce that NHTSA is doubling its heatstroke awareness campaign budget for next year – to \$3 million. Combined with the efforts of our regional offices and in partnership with state governments, as well as through the press and online, NHTSA will continue to educate the public about this vital issue.

Switching to the topic of car seat safety, too many children are hospitalized or killed in car crashes. As Brian mentioned earlier, we estimate that properly installed car seats saved the lives of more than 300 children under age five in 2017 alone. That's great news, but we can do even better. That's why NHTSA is working to introduce and finalize several safety initiatives in the coming months that will improve crash protection for children in car seats.

First, one of the best ways to save lives is to improve our methods of testing vehicles and equipment—better tests lead to better designs.

Thanks to our research, we've developed a new seat fixture for evaluating child seat safety in frontal crashes. Crash tests performed with this new fixture produce outcomes that better represent those encountered in modern vehicles. When finalized, this new test procedure will help us better understand how children in car seats are affected in the event of a frontal crash—and that will help us all improve our designs and requirements.

In addition, we're working to introduce a new safety standard for small children that will enhance the safety of car seats for side impact crashes. To help with this, we're also working to finalize the design of a new 3-year old crash test dummy for use in the new side impact test of car seats for children. Called the Q3s, this crash test dummy will add to NHTSA's existing family of crash test dummies to help protect children.

And we're not forgetting older children in booster seats. Based on the types of injury data observed in crashes related to children, we have also developed a new 10-year-old child crash test dummy with significantly enhanced head, spine, and abdominal characteristics, and we are currently assessing it for use in evaluating booster seat performance in frontal crashes. We believe this new crash dummy has a more human-like crash response and can better predict injury risk.

Similarly, we are also developing a new testing method that can reliably replicate how seat belts spool out during a crash in the real world. This will improve our crash testing by enhancing our ability to assess and improve real world safety for older children in booster seats.

We're also proud to announce that today NHTSA is publishing an Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking seeking comment on seat belt-use warning systems for rear seats in vehicles.

Finally, while we all know that car seats are the safest place for children, parents like me also know how hard it can sometimes be to properly install them. NHTSA shares your concerns, and that's why we're also working on a separate rulemaking to improve the usability of tethers and lower anchorages for attaching car seats in today's vehicles.

As you can tell, we're working hard to make vehicles safer for our kids. We are blessed to have a large team of dedicated experts here at NHTSA—engineers, scientists, traffic safety specialists, and economists—and I am proud to work with them as we find ways to improve safety and save the lives of children. Of course, we also appreciate the support and help we get from our outside partners, including state and local governments, to help spread the child safety message.

Thank you again for coming, and for all you do to increase child safety on our roads.