



Research In Progress

Evaluating a Tween/Parent Seat Belt Demonstration Program

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Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death of children ages 8 – 15 (sometimes referred to as “tweens”). Child restraints and seat belts are the single most effective way to decrease injuries and fatalities in motor vehicle crashes and primary seat belt laws have been shown effective in increasing restraint use. In some states tweens may be too old to be covered by child passenger safety laws and too young to be covered by adult seat belt laws.

Front seat restraint use by children 8 – 15 dropped from a high of 84% in 2006 to 80% in 2007. During the same period, restraint use in children ages 0 – 7 increased from 84% to 89% (NOPUS). The percentage of tween dying unrestrained has been holding steady at around 59% while the rate for occupants 16 and older is 55%. Among fatalities in the 13 - 15 age group, 65% were unrestrained.

Studies have shown that one way to ensure that children are properly protected in seat belts is to make sure their parents and other drivers wear seat belts. Despite occurrences of youthful rebellion, tweens tend to live by the rules and examples set by their parents. While children may express a desire not to wear seat belts, research suggests that there is little resistance when parents tell them to buckle up. However, some parents note a gap in messaging directed to them regarding seat belt safety for children ages 13 – 15. Parents receive substantial information on keeping infants and toddler safe in vehicles, but messages regarding post booster seat children is sparse.

NHTSA aims to develop a model tween seat belt program to increase belt use among children ages 13 – 15. The program activities will focus on convincing parents to influence their tween to use seat belts all the time. This project will provide an independent evaluation to assess the model tween seat belt program.

Start Date:	09/22/2009
End Date:	September, 2012
Contractor:	Regents of the University of Michigan
Contract Number:	DTNH22-07-D-00052, TO# 0004
Total Contract Cost:	\$368,460.00

Date Last Updated: January 2012