

If you have been involved in a car crash and had a child restrained in a child car seat, the seat *may* need to be replaced.



In April of 2004, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) announced changes to the agency's recommendations about replacing child safety seats following a crash. NHTSA explains:

"The change was made to ensure parents or caregivers continue to correctly restrain their children following a minor crash and to reduce the financial burden of unnecessary child safety seat replacement." NHTSA believes "the existing evidence is sufficient to warrant a revision to its public advice on the issue."

NHTSA continues to advise parents and caregivers that child safety seats should be replaced if they have been involved in a moderate or severe crash.

A crash is minor—and the child seat involved in it is safe for reuse—if it meets **ALL** of the following criteria:

1. A visual inspection of the child safety seat, including inspection under any easily movable seat padding, does not reveal any cracks or deformation that might have been caused by the crash;
2. The vehicle in which the child safety seat was installed was capable of being driven from the crash scene;
3. The vehicle door nearest the child safety seat was undamaged;
4. There were no injuries to any of the vehicle occupants; and
5. The air bags (if any) did not deploy.

Crashes that meet **ALL of these criteria** are much less severe than the dynamic test used in compliance tests of FMVSS 213 "Child Restraint Systems," and are highly unlikely to affect future child safety seat performance. Therefore, parents and caregivers can be confident that child restraints involved in these minor crashes will continue to provide a high level of protection.

NHTSA and the Washington State Safety Restraint Coalition recommend parents and caregivers check with their child seat manufacturer with regard to performance, operation, and installation of their child restraint. Most car seat instruction booklets as of May 2004 continue to recommend child safety seats be replaced if they have been involved in a car crash. Look in the car seat owner's manual for your manufacturer's statement of their policy.

Some insurance carriers may reimburse you for the replacement of a new car seat if it was in a crash. Check with the insurance carrier handling the crash for more details

Here are samples of replacement guidelines from a variety of sources (current as of May 2004). This information may assist you when submitting an insurance claim:

- **Excerpt from *Car Safety Seats, A Guide for Families***, published by the American Academy of Pediatrics says “Do not use a seat that was in a crash. It may have been weakened and should not be used, even if it looks fine. Do not use a car safety seat if you do not know its full history.”
- **The Juvenile Product Manufacturer’s Association** website offers a brochure about keeping baby safe and comfortable. Titled, *Safe and Sound*, it is a guide to baby product safety, use and selection. Page seven, “*Car Seats and Booster Seats*”, says “Do not use a car seat or booster that has ever been involved in a crash.”
- **Evenflo 2003: What do I do if my car seat is in an accident?**
Please discontinue use immediately and contact the *Evenflo Parent Link Consumer Resource Center* at (800) 233-5921. There may be, in some cases, internal stresses that cannot be seen.
- **GRACO 2003: I was recently in an accident. Do I have to replace my child's car seat? There doesn't appear to be any damage.**
Yes. You must replace your child's car seat if it was involved in an accident, no matter what. Even if there appears to be no damage to the car seat on the surface, the impact and force of a collision can cause unseen structural damage to the interior of your car seat. Any such damage may prohibit your car seat from properly protecting your child in the event of a sudden stop or crash. Some insurance carriers will reimburse you for the replacement of a new car seat if it was in a crash. Check with your insurance carrier for more details.
- **Britax 2003:**
Britax strongly advises against buying or using a second hand child restraint. You can never be certain how it has been used or abused, if all the necessary labels, instructions or parts are still there and parts correctly assembled, whether it has ever been involved in a crash, and the restraint may be technically out of date with the latest in features.