

# Motor Vehicle Safety Success Story

## *Initiative of the Injury Prevention Service*

### Oklahoma Makes Strides in Child Passenger Safety

Motor vehicle crashes (MVCs) are the leading cause of injury death for children both nationally and in Oklahoma. Proper child restraint use alone can reduce the risk of death by 71% for infants younger than 1 year of age and 54% for children aged 1-4 years. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), every year over 618,000 children aged 0-12 years ride in vehicles without a car seat, booster seat, or seat belt, at least some of the time. Even when children are restrained in a car seat, 80% have errors in installation or harnessing that could prevent effective protection or even cause an injury in a



Children in Oklahoma must be rear-facing until age 2.

crash.

Evidence-based strategies recommended for increasing child restraint use and decreasing MVC-related injuries include comprehensive child passenger safety (CPS) laws, child safety seat distribution programs, and educational programs. The Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) has maintained a child safety seat

distribution and education program for the past 18 years. However, until recently the state child passenger safety law was weak and outdated. It only required children younger than 6 years of age to be restrained in a car seat or booster seat, and it did not specify when it is appropriate for children to transition from rear-facing to forward-facing or from car seat to a booster seat and from booster seat to a seat belt.

With technical

The new CPS law requires:

- Children under 2 years of age be restrained in a rear-facing car seat
- Children under 4 years of age be restrained in a car seat with an internal harness
- Children under 8 years of age be restrained in a car seat or booster seat unless they are taller than 4'9".

assistance from OSDH and other partners, Oklahoma legislators passed a comprehensive child passenger safety law. The new law, which became effective November 1, 2015, follows the recommendations of the American Academy of Pediatrics and is one of the strongest in the country.

In anticipation of the new CPS law going into effect, OSDH and several partners in CPS collaborated to create an infographic to explain the new

law to parents, caregivers, and child care providers. Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant (PHHSBG) funding was used to cover a portion of the cost of creating, printing and distributing the infographic statewide in the form of brochures and posters. So far, over 40,000 brochures and nearly 300 posters have been distributed to parents, child care providers, hospitals, physicians' offices, Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) clinics, and other organizations.

The new CPS law also resulted in a greater need for CPS education and safety seat distribution. The central office of the OSDH and 54 of the 68 county health departments in Oklahoma serve as child safety seat distribution sites. Each site has at least

one certified CPS technician on staff who is responsible for distributing and installing car seats and booster seats and educating clients on proper use. Car seats are partially funded by PHHSBG funds.

Approximately 20% of the population of Oklahoma resides in Oklahoma County. The Emergency Medical Services Authority (EMSA) and the Latino Community Development Agency, who are long time partners of OSDH, provided car seats on an as-needed basis, but they lost funding for their car seat programs. This left OSDH, SafeKids Oklahoma and Infant Crisis Services as the only child safety seat distribution sites in the county. Of those three, only OSDH, distributes seats on an as-needed basis, despite only having one certified CPS technician on staff.

In order to increase the capacity for CPS

in Oklahoma County, OSDH established a contract with the Oklahoma City-County Health Department (OCCHD) using PHHSBG funding to support an injury prevention specialist. The injury prevention specialist became certified in CPS, and OCCHD serves as an additional child safety seat distribution site in Oklahoma County. The injury prevention specialist also provides additional injury prevention programming within the county.

The PHHSBG funding was also used to cover the cost of the motor vehicle safety health educator attending a course to become a certified CPS technician in order to assist in car seat distribution, installation and education at OSDH, thereby increasing the capacity for CPS at OSDH. Since the CPS law went into effect, the average

number of car seats and booster seats distributed monthly by OSDH increased by more than 50%, from 29 in the spring of 2015 to 44 in the spring of 2016.