

Safe Transportation of Newborns Discharged From the Hospital

All newborns discharged from hospitals should be transported home in infant car safety seats that are designed appropriately to safely transport healthy newborns, premature infants, or infants with special needs.

Assuring that newborns are restrained properly when riding for the first time sets the stage for continued compliance with a measure that can save their lives or prevent serious injury. Correctly used infant/child safety seats are 71% effective in preventing fatalities due to car crashes, and 67% effective in preventing injury requiring hospitalization.¹ With 100% correct use, about 53 000 injuries and 500 deaths could be prevented each year in the United States among children from birth to 4 years of age.²

Although the Every Ride, Safe Ride program of the American Academy of Pediatrics has made major contributions to child passenger safety, including the passage of legislation in all 50 states requiring infants and children to ride properly restrained, newborns continue to be discharged from hospitals without infant car safety seats or in ones that are not being used correctly. A recent study of hospital discharge policies and procedures has shown that only 26% of hospitals with obstetric services have a policy concerning the discharge of newborns in car safety seats. Of those hospitals that have a policy, 64% waive the requirement that newborns be discharged in a car safety seat if the parents do not supply a seat upon discharge.³ A similar study of hospitals accounting for 90% of annual births in Michigan showed that only 24% of hospitals discuss the use of car safety seats with parents, and only 4% demonstrate their use.⁴

The recommendations in this statement do not indicate an exclusive course of treatment or procedure to be followed. Variations, taking into account individual circumstances, may be appropriate.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

In conjunction with their pediatric and obstetric staffs, all hospitals with services for newborns should develop policies regarding the discharge of newborns in approved car safety seats. Although it is recognized that the resources of both hospitals and patients vary greatly, all hospitals should set as a stated goal the discharge of every newborn in a child safety seat.

Newborn discharge policies should include:

- Procedures by which each newborn is to be discharged in a car safety seat appropriate to his maturity and medical condition. Procedures ideally should include instruction and education for proper use of the car seat in the automobile.
- Establishment of an educational module for parents on the correct use of car safety seats to be conducted before discharge. "Hands-on" training should be used in the module.
- Provisions for in-service training of staff responsible for parent education on correct use of infant car safety seats on discharge.
- Provisions to make available an appropriate infant safety seat for short-term loan to parents lacking a car seat at the time of discharge.
- Methods by which parents will be informed of the hospital's policy before delivery so that they can obtain a car safety seat in advance.
- Designation of an individual responsible to carry out this hospital policy.

Pediatricians should not only work with hospitals in establishing such policies but also reinforce the need for compliance with both hospital staff and parents. Pediatricians should include the discharge of their patients in car safety seats as part of their discharge orders.

Hospital staff should monitor compliance with the policies periodically and take appropriate actions to correct deficiencies when found.

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