



The Do's and Don'ts of Transporting Children in an Ambulance

Approximately 6 million children are transported by emergency medical services (EMS) vehicles each year in the United States. There are risks of injury associated with transport that can be minimized. An ambulance is NOT a standard passenger vehicle. Unlike the well-developed and publicized child passenger safety standards and guidelines, specifications for the safe transport of ill and injured children in ambulances are still under development. Standard automotive safety practices and techniques cannot be applied directly to EMS vehicle environments due to biomechanical and practical differences. Caution is encouraged in the application of passenger vehicle principles to ambulances and in the utilization of new and unproven products.

The Emergency Medical Services for Children (EMSC) Program supports efforts to improve the safety of pediatric patients being transported in EMS vehicles. Through an EMSC grant, the Division of Pediatric Emergency Medicine at Johns Hopkins Children's Center conducted the first ever ambulance vehicle crash safety tests using instrumented crash test dummies to test the performance of these vehicles and a variety of occupant and equipment restraint practices currently available or in use. The data from these and other detailed safety tests are currently being analyzed and will be an integral element in the development of safety guidelines for the transport of ill and injured children.

Currently, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's (NHTSA) Office of EMS and Occupant Protection Division are working with the EMSC Program to develop recommendations for how EMS can safely transport ill or injured – and uninjured – children in ambulances.

Until consensus recommendations are available, certain practices can significantly decrease the likelihood of a crash, and in the event of a crash or near collision, can significantly decrease the potential for injury. These practices are listed below in the format of "Do's" and "Don'ts."

Importantly, as is mandated in several states, the NHTSA Emergency Vehicle Operating Course (EVOC) National Standard Curriculum, or its equivalent, is an integral part of this transport safety enhancement.

Do's

- DO drive cautiously at safe speeds observing traffic laws.
- DO tightly secure all monitoring devices and other equipment.
- DO ensure available restraint systems are used by EMTs and other occupants, including the patient.
- DO transport children who are not patients, properly restrained, in an alternate passenger vehicle, whenever possible.
- DO encourage utilization of the EVOC, National Standard Curriculum.

Don'ts

- DO NOT drive at unsafe high speeds with rapid acceleration, decelerations, and turns.
- DO NOT leave monitoring devices and other equipment unsecured in moving EMS vehicles.
- DO NOT allow parents, caregivers, EMTs or other passengers to be unrestrained during transport.
- DO NOT have the child/infant held in the parent, caregiver, or EMT's arms or lap during transport.
- DO NOT allow emergency vehicles to be operated by persons who have not completed EVOC or an equivalent course.