

Safe & Healthy Travel

The celebrations of the holiday season (beginning with Thanksgiving and continuing through New Year's Day) typically include more time on the road—shopping, traveling and attending holiday parties. Traffic crashes are the leading cause of injury and death to children and adults. A large number of these crashes occur when alcohol consumption is combined with driving.

It is astonishing to think that every 33 minutes someone is killed in an alcohol-related crash. At holiday times, the number of crashes due to drunk drivers can increase by 10 percent or more. In 1998, 38 percent of all the fatal traffic crashes involved alcohol, but during Christmas time nearly 48 percent involved alcohol, and on New Year's Day approximately 69 percent of all fatal crashes involved alcohol.

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Children are too frequently the victims in alcohol-related car crashes. Tragically, from 1985 to 1996, 3,556 of the 5,555 children killed in alcohol-related crashes were passengers in a car with a drunk driver at the wheel. Nearly 2,400 (67 percent of 3,556) of these drinking drivers were old enough to be the child's parent or caretaker.



Over the past twenty years a lot of attention has been given to the underage drunk driver. Although young people still drink and drive, the number of underage drunk driving fatalities has declined by 33 percent from 1988 to 1998. However, drivers between 21 and 34 years of age have been more resistant to curbing their drinking and driving habits, and are responsible for more than half of all alcohol-involved, fatal vehicle crashes.

Drinking alcohol before driving is often coupled with other risk-taking behaviors. Drunk drivers are less likely to use a seat belt themselves or buckle up their child passengers. Not surprisingly, the likelihood of driving with appropriate safety restraints decreases with the increase in alcohol consumed.

Safe driving tips

- *Adopt a zero-alcohol-tolerance* policy when transporting children.
- *Always buckle up* and teach your children to buckle up.
- *Secure your child* in the appropriate car seat or safety belt every time they ride.
- *Check the car seat manufacturer's directions* to be sure about the correct age and weight limits of the car seat.
- *Be sure infants ride facing the back* of the car until they are at least 1 year old and weigh at least 20 pounds. This position protects the neck by supporting the baby's head.
- *A convertible or toddler safety seat that faces forward* should be used for children between 1 and 4 years old (between 20 and 40 pounds).
- *Use a safety seat or booster seat* for children until they are at least 6 years old OR at least 60 pounds. The safety belt should fit so the lap belt hugs the thighs and the shoulder belt crosses the shoulder, not the neck.

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Provided by California Childcare Health Program
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