

# **The Use of Child Safety Seats In Nebraska**

## **The Results of a Survey of Child Safety Seat Use Fall 2016**

Prepared for Nebraska Department of Roads Highway Safety Office

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October 26, 2016

## Executive Summary

Children up to six years of age were observed for child restraint system use as they were riding as a passenger in a vehicle. Safety seat/booster seat use was observed in both front and rear seats. Estimates of the age of the children were based on the observer's judgment.

Observations occurred at the same sites and on the same weekend days and times as in previous years.

Among the 1,035 children observed in 905 vehicles during September and October 2016, 98.4% were in child safety seat/booster seats. This is the highest rate since the surveys began in 1999 when the percentage was 56.2%.

Of those observed in safety seat/booster seats, 95.6% were in the rear seat of the vehicles observed and 4.4% were in the front seat. In the rural counties 93.6% were in the rear seat, 6.4% in the front seat. In the urban counties 96.5% were in the rear seat and 3.5% in the front seat.

Of the children rural counties, 97.9% were in safety seat/booster seats; in urban counties, 98.6% were in safety seat/booster seats.

Of the small number of children not in safety seat/booster seats, 35.3% were in the front seats; 42.9% in rural counties and 30% in urban counties.

## Background

The survey described in this report was designed to provide an estimate of child safety seat/booster seat use in Nebraska.

Observations of child safety seat/booster seat use were conducted in the three urban counties identified in Nebraska's original 1998 annual safety belt survey and in four rural counties whose safety belt use ranked in the lower half of all counties surveyed in Nebraska's 1998 Safety Belt Survey. These were essentially the same sites observed in the annual Child Safety Seat Use reports from 1999 to 2010. Some sites were modified to capture more traveled intersections as traffic patterns changed.

Observations occurred for 40 minutes at 14 heavily trafficked intersections in the three urban counties, and twice each at two heavily traveled intersections in the four rural counties. The urban observations included five Douglas County sites, five Lancaster County sites, and four Sarpy County sites. The rural observations included two sites in Adams, Gage, Jefferson and Phelps Counties, with observations occurring twice at each site (Appendix A).

The intersections were drawn from the intersections used in the state's original 1998 safety belt survey and were picked purposely from all sampled intersections to

maximize the likelihood of child riders in the vehicles observed. Intersections close to shopping malls, for example, were selected over intersections in outlying areas.

To maximize the likelihood of child passengers, all observations were conducted on Saturdays, between the hours of 9:45 a.m. and 5:30 p.m., during September and October 2014. No observations were conducted on Interstate road segments.

Observations were conducted in the same manner as those in Nebraska's annual safety belt survey. Child safety seat/booster seat use was observed in both front and rear seats. Estimates of the age of the children were based on the observer's judgment. If a child was judged to be under age six and was buckled in a safety seat/booster seat in either the front or the rear seat, they were counted as a "safety seat user". If the child or children were not in either a child safety seat or a booster seat and were buckled into an adult shoulder belt system, they were counted as a "non-safety seat user".

No estimate could be made of the quality of the child safety seat/booster seats observed or how well they were installed or how well the child was secured in the seat.

## Results

Of the 905 vehicles observed 31.9% were in rural counties and 68.1% were in urban counties. Of the 1,035 children observed 67.4% were in urban counties and 32.6% were in rural counties (Table 1).

Of the 1035 children 98.4% were observed in child safety seat/booster seats. Of those in safety seat/booster seats, 95.6% were in the rear seats of the vehicles observed and 4.4% were in the front seats.

Of the 1.6% of children who were not in safety seat/booster seats, 64.7% were traveling in the rear seats and 35.3% were traveling in the front seats.

## Rural-Urban Differences

Sixty seven point four percent (67.4 %) of all safety seat/booster seat observations were made in the three urban counties (Douglas, Lancaster, and Sarpy) and 32.6% were made in the four rural counties (Adams, Gage, Jefferson, and Phelps Counties).

Of children observed in urban counties, 98.6% were in child safety seat/booster seats. Of the urban children in child safety seat/booster seats, 96.5% were in the rear seats and 3.5% were in the front seats.

Of the children observed in the four rural counties, 97.9% were in child safety seat/booster seats, 93.6% in the rear seats and 6.4% were in the front seats of the vehicles observed.

Of the children not in safety seat/booster seats in the urban counties, 70% were in the rear seats and 30% were in the front seats. In the rural counties, of the children not in safety seat/booster seats, 57.1% were in the rear seats and 42.9% were in the front seats.

In total, 35.3% of the children not in child safety seat/booster seats were riding in the front seats of their vehicles.

## **Conclusion**

The rate of child safety seat/booster seat use in Nebraska has reached its highest point since recordings were initiated in 1999. The continuing challenge is to remind each new generation of those responsible for children in vehicles of the need to correctly and consistently use child restraints and booster seats and to not use them in the front seats of vehicles. The most difficult and likely impossible challenge is to convince those responsible for the 1.6% of the children not observed in child restraints or booster seats to use them. More important is the need reinforce those using safety seat/booster seats to maintain this practice.

**Table 1**  
**Child Safety Seat/Booster Seat Use Since 1999**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Percentage Restrained in Child Safety/ Booster Seats</u>	<u>Percentage Restrained in <b>Rear</b> Child Safety/ Booster Seats</u>	<u>Percentage Restrained in <b>Urban Counties</b></u>	<u>Percentage Restrained in <b>Rural Counties</b></u>
1999	56.2	92.5	55.7	57.3
2000	66.4	95.5	66.7	65.4
2001	67.4	96.6	68.1	64.8
2002	69.6	95.0	69.3	70.4
2003	86.2	93.6	88.5	81.5
2004	87.7	95.7	85.9	91.3
2005	84.3	94.0	87.0	78.7
2006	88.6	91.9	87.8	90.0
2007	93.2	97.0	92.7	94.0
2008	96.8	97.3	96.3	97.7
2009	95.1	96.6	95.4	94.5
2010	91.5	92.0	92.4	90.0
2011	95.1	97.1	96.0	93.0
2012	95.9	96.8	95.8	96.0
2013	95.9	95.6	95.8	96.1
2014	96.9	95.3	97.1	96.5
2015	96.9	96.1	97.0	96.7
2016	98.4	95.6	98.6	97.9

**Appendix A**  
Results of Observations of 30 Intersections

Intersection	Total No. Vehicles	Total No. with Seats			Total No. w/o Seats		
		Front Seat	Rear Seat	Total	Front Seat	Rear Seat	Total
1*	38	1	43	44	0	1	1
2*	54	1	57	58	1	0	1
3*	55	3	57	60	0	2	2
4*	46	3	46	49	0	0	0
5*	54	2	58	60	1	0	1
6*	45	1	46	47	0	0	0
7*	38	4	38	42	0	0	0
8*	54	2	63	65	0	1	1
9*	52	1	56	57	1	0	1
10*	49	1	58	59	0	1	1
11*	41	1	43	44	0	0	0
12*	29	1	34	35	0	1	1
13*	27	2	29	31	0	0	0
14*	34	1	36	37	0	1	1
15	10	2	9	11	0	0	0
16	12	1	12	13	1	0	1
17	14	1	15	16	0	0	0
18	9	1	10	11	0	1	1
19	34	3	36	39	1	0	1
20	28	3	33	36	0	1	1
21	25	3	26	29	1	0	1
22	26	1	33	34	0	0	0
23	7	1	7	8	0	0	0
24	11	0	13	13	0	0	0
25	10	0	10	10	0	0	0
26	14	0	13	13	0	1	1
27	20	0	22	22	0	1	1
28	19	1	19	20	0	0	0
29	28	2	27	29	0	0	0
30	22	2	24	26	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>905</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>973</b>	<b>1,018</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Total Children Observed</b>							<b>1,035</b>

\*Urban Counties