



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Alabama's seat belt usage higher than ever reported; child restraint usage down

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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More Alabamians than ever are protecting themselves by buckling up, according to 2006 survey results. The seat belt usage rate was a reported 83 percent, as compared to 82 percent in 2005.

While child restraint use in Alabama remains high--this year's rate is 88 percent compared to 92 percent last year--Alabamians are not choosing the appropriate restraint or the safest location in the vehicle. New data show nearly half (43 percent) of the children 5 years old and under restrained in motor vehicles in 2006 were seated in the front seat. Almost all (92 percent) of the children in the front seat were wearing a seat belt only.

"We have known for some time that although most parents believe they are restraining their children appropriately, four out of five car seats are used incorrectly. Now we have data that show the types of mistakes parents are making in restraining their children," stated Nancy Wright, assistant director of Injury Prevention.

Motor vehicle-related deaths are the number one cause of death due to injury in the state. Injury and death due to motor vehicle crashes can be prevented through the use of seat belts and child safety seats. In 2005, 1,135 people were killed and more than 44,000 were injured in motor vehicle crashes in Alabama. Of those killed, 50 percent were not wearing safety restraints. Based on 2004 data, there is a 55 percent probability that a typical driver in Alabama will be involved in an injury or fatal crash while driving an automobile in his or her lifetime.

Using guidelines required by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the study observed 57,449 front seat occupants in 15 selected counties to determine seat belt use. A separate study observed 2,730 children age 5 and under in any position in the vehicle across 15 selected counties to determine car seat usage.

"Many partners have worked together to improve passenger safety in the state, and will continue to do so in the future," said State Health Officer Dr. Donald Williamson. "Continued educational efforts, as well as continued law enforcement initiatives, are needed in order to improve restraint use and reduce death due to injury."

Agencies and organizations such as the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs, Children's Health System, Alabama Department of Transportation,

Alabama Department of Public Safety and the Alabama Department of Public Health have collaborated to increase passenger safety in the state through educational and enforcement efforts.

Through Alabama's "Click It or Ticket" campaign state, county and municipal law enforcement agencies conduct massive enforcement of the state's safety belt laws, including public safety checkpoints.

"There is a correlation between adult seat belt usage and child restraint usage. We must continue to inform adults about restraining themselves in addition to restraining their children properly," said Ms. Wright.

The following are guidelines from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration regarding restraints:

- * Rear-facing infant seats-- birth to at least age 1 **and** less than 20 pounds.
- * Forward-facing child safety seats-- age 1 to about age 4 and 20 to 40 pounds.
- * Booster seat-- about ages 4 to 8 and under 4 feet 9 inches tall and 40 to 80 pounds.
- * Lap and shoulder belts-- at least age 8 or over 4 feet 9 inches tall.
- * Check with an expert and always read a vehicle owner's manual for advice on installing safety seats properly.
- * All children 13 and under should be restrained in the back seat.

To ensure that children are properly restrained, nearly 20 permanent inspection sites are located statewide with certified child passenger safety specialists and instructors to assist parents in the correct installation of car seats.

For more information on seat belts, child restraints or to find a local inspection station, please visit the Alabama Department of Public Health's Web site at www.adph.org/injuryprevention.

11/1/06

**News Conference to announce
Alabama's Seat Belt/Child Restraint Usage Rates
Wednesday, November 1, 2006, 10 a.m. CT**

SUBJECT: Observational surveys record Alabama's seat belt and child restraint usage rates annually. A news conference will announce this year's rates and provide guidance on passenger safety issues.

Speakers will be:

Dr. Donald Williamson, State Health Officer

Robert H. Pruitt, Director, Law Enforcement/Traffic Safety Division, Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs

Major Patrick Manning, Chief, Highway Patrol Division, Alabama Department of Public Safety.

The Alabama Department of Public Health will broadcast this news conference via satellite and webcast for your free and unrestricted use. You are invited to the news conference at the RSA Tower, Suite 940, 201 Monroe St., Montgomery, AL 36104 beginning at 10 a.m. central time

Set-up time 9:50 -10:00 CT
News conference begins at 10:00 CT

Satellite Downlink Coordinates:

C BAND:

Satellite: Galaxy 16 (Formerly Gal 4); Transponder: 23

Orbital Position: 99 degrees West

Downlink Frequency: 4160 MHz; Polarity: Horizontal

Audio: 6.2-6.8

Ku BAND:

Satellite: SBS 6; Transponder: 9

Orbital Position: 74 degrees West

Downlink Frequency: 11921.0 MHz; Polarity: Horizontal

Audio: 6.2-6.8

If there are satellite technical questions, call 1-800-811-6047.

Webcast Information

News conference will also be available via live webcast.

RealPlayer is required to view the webcast.

Go to www.adph.org/alphntn

Click on the "view webcast" link

If there are webcast technical questions, call 334-206-5618.