



Get the Facts: Occupant and Air Bags Protection

In a Nutshell

Air bags, used correctly with seat belts, are a critical line of passenger defense in a front end crash.

What do I need to know about air bags?

Air bags are supplemental safety devices - they must be used with a seat belt to be most effective. They've been credited with saving thousands of lives and reduce the risk of serious head injuries. They are designed to help keep your head, neck and chest safe in a front-end crash. Most often, an airbag will deploy when a vehicle hits another vehicle or a solid object. An air bag is not a soft, billowy pillow. It comes out of the dashboard at up to 200 miles per hour, faster than the blink of an eye. Because of this great force, an air bag can injure those who are too close to it.

How do I keep myself and passengers safe in a crash in an air bag-equipped vehicle?

Minnesota's seat belt use law requires everybody of all ages in every seating position in the vehicle to be buckled up or ride in an approved child passenger safety restraint. Drivers should sit with at least a 10-inch clearance between the center of the steering wheel or dashboard and their chest. The steering wheel should be tilted upward, not straight across from the torso. Passengers in the front seat should double the distance due to the increased size of the passenger airbag.

Infants in rear-facing child safety seats should never be placed in front of active passenger air bags. Children under 13 should always be restrained in a child safety seat or a seat belt in the back seat. Even if there isn't a passenger air bag in the vehicle, the safest place for infants and children is properly secured

On or off? In very few cases, an air bag should not be used. These include drivers who have a medical condition that places them at specific risk, people who cannot adjust their driver's position to keep 10 inches between the center of the steering wheel and their chest, and drivers who must transport children under 13 in the front passenger seat.

If you or any user of your vehicle is in one of these risk groups, you may be eligible for a key-operated switch allows an air bag to be turned on and off. Remember, if you are not in a specific risk group, lack of an air bag increases risk that someone may suffer a head, neck or chest injury.





and buckled up in the back seat. Check your vehicle owner's manual and the instructions provided with your child safety seat for correct use information.

Play it safe!

- Airbags are safe and designed to provide supplemental protection for belted occupants. However, **air bags are very dangerous to children riding in rear-facing car safety seats.**
- Air bags do not replace seatbelts. **Wear your seatbelt!**
- Air bags differ by vehicle and manufacturer. Read your manual and call your manufacturer with questions.
- Many manufacturers are installing depowered air bags with their vehicles which deploy with less force than current air bags. However, with depowered air bags, **rear-facing child seats should never be placed in the front seat.** Children are safest in the back seat.
- Air bags increase the protection you get from seat belts alone. If the air bag is turned off, you lose this extra protection.
- Pregnant women should buckle up and remain as far back from the air bag as possible and use it unless she meets one of the risk profiles.

Sources: Minnesota Department of Public Safety, Office of Traffic Safety

