

saskatchewan
preventioninstitute
our goal is **healthy** children

Submission to Special Committee on Traffic Safety
Government of Saskatchewan

By

Saskatchewan Prevention Institute

The Saskatchewan Prevention Institute is a provincial, non-profit organization with a mandate to reduce the occurrence of disabling conditions in children. To that end, the Institute programs in the area of prevention of injuries to children, including work in the areas of child passengers, bicycle and wheeled activities, and pedestrian safety. The injury morbidity and mortality for Saskatchewan children resulting from traffic related injuries are significant and should be considered by the Special Committee on Traffic Safety.

CHILD PASSENGERS

Motor vehicle collisions are the leading cause of death to children over 1 year of age in Canada. In 2012 in Saskatchewan, there were 9 child fatalities (12 years and under). This is a substantial increase compared with 2011 (0 fatalities), 2010 (2 fatalities), and 2009 (2 fatalities). Of the total child fatalities (13) from 2009-2012, 11 were to children between the ages of 4-12. In 2012, all of the child fatalities were within this age group. This is significant because the majority of the children in this age group should be in a properly fitted belt positioning booster. A child using a seat belt only, instead of a properly fitted booster seat, is at three times greater risk of injury and four times greater risk of a head injury (Canadian Pediatric Society).

Currently, Saskatchewan is one of only four provinces and territories that do not have booster seat legislation (also Alberta, Nunavut and Northwest Territories). Saskatchewan consistently receives the lowest rating of “Poor” in the category of booster seat legislation in the “Are We Doing Enough: Status Report on Canadian public policy and child youth health” from the Canadian Pediatric Society. Currently only 30% of children who should be using a boost seat are using them for in-vehicle transportation across Canada. Research shows that booster seat legislation does increase booster usage, and also reduces the occurrence of fatality of children (Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics).

Organizations that provide care to children through a mandate given to them by the Provincial Government should be transporting children in accordance to the law (TSA 248(4)(b)) and child passenger safety best practices. These children include those who are in the care of Social Services, foster care, licenced daycares, health regions, school boards, and children being released from medical care and require special equipment in order that they are transported safely (i.e. after surgery). Careful consideration must be given to models of child restraints selected and types of vehicles used to transport children safely and easily by these caregivers.

Saskatchewan statistics show that over 80% of Saskatchewan children are not being properly transported. This number is even higher among low income families as they lack the finances to afford a child restraint appropriate for their children. In many situations, these families will have car seats that are inappropriate for their children, or often will not use a child car seat at all. Many of these children are members of families who are recipients of Saskatchewan Assistance Program, a program that is designed to meet the basic needs of children.

Whether a family lives in a rural or urban centre, or owns/has access to a passenger vehicle, all children will need to be transported during their early lives. In Saskatchewan, transportation by private vehicles is a reality for families and their children. It is imperative that children are transported safely and in accordance with the law.

Proper child car seats are an absolute necessity for all of Saskatchewan's children. Currently, the Saskatchewan Assistance Program will provide funds for the purchase of items for children such as cribs and highchairs. However, the policy does not cover child car seats, which is a basic need for Saskatchewan children and one that is mandated by Provincial Law.

BICYCLES, WHEELED ACTIVITIES AND PEDESTRIANS

Cycling and other wheeled activities are great forms of transportation and recreation. Cycling allows children and youth to be healthy and active as well as have fun. However, appropriate steps must be taken to ensure that children and youth are safe when participating in these activities. Children, youth, parents, caregivers, and communities need to be well-educated regarding the importance of safe cycling practises and the devastating injuries that can occur when practises such as helmet use are not followed.

In Canada, four provinces (British Columbia, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island) have helmet legislation that applies to all ages; three provinces (Alberta, Manitoba, and Ontario) have legislation that applies to individuals 18 years of age and younger; Saskatchewan, along with five other provinces does not have any provincial legislation in place. In most jurisdictions, parents are responsible for ensuring that children younger than 16 comply with the law. In general, law enforcement activities have taken an educational rather than a punitive approach; they have focused on educating parents and children and using the law as an incentive to encourage the purchase and use of helmets.

Research from provinces with legislation shows that helmet use has increased – in some cases dramatically – since the laws came into effect. A study in Halifax, Nova Scotia shows that helmet use more than doubled after legislation came into effect in 1997 (jumping from 35% to 80%) and stayed there for at least two years.

Children must also be educated on pedestrian best practises as walking is the primary mode of transportation for children under the age of 16.

Research shows that education alone is not necessarily the most effective strategy in encouraging safe behaviour. Although education is the most commonly used strategy to reduce injury among children, evaluations of bicycle education campaigns show how difficult it is to change behaviour solely through educational efforts. Therefore, multifaceted programs comprised of legislation, education and enforcement are needed. The most effective promotion programs involve legislation mandating safe behaviour, including the use of child restraints and the use of helmets for wheeled activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED BY THE SASKATCHEWAN PREVENTION INSTITUTE TO THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON TRAFFIC SAFETY

- Implement booster seat legislation in the Saskatchewan Traffic Safety Act.
- Create child transportation policy for organizations that fall under Provincial Government's responsibility. This policy should reflect child passenger safety best practice and provincial law.
- Explore ways to ensure every child has a safe ride in a motor vehicle. The addition of funding through the Saskatchewan Assistance Program for child seats could be used to ensure low income families can properly protect their children.
- Implement bicycle and wheeled activity helmet legislation.

References

Canadian Pediatric Society (2012). *Are we doing enough? A status report on Canadian public policy and child and youth health*. Retrieved from <http://www.cps.ca/advocacy/StatusReport2012.pdf>

Mannix, R., Flegler, E., Meehan, W. P., Schutzman, S. A., Hennelly, K., Nigrovic, L. and Lee, L.K (2012). Booster seat laws and fatalities in children 4 to 7 years of age. *Pediatrics*, 130 (6), 996-1002.

Safe Kids Canada . (2010). *Safe Kids Canada position statement on bicycle helmet legislation*. Retrieved June 06, 2013 from http://www.parachutecanada.org/downloads/policy/Helmet_legislation_position_statement_EN_FINAL.pdf

