

SUVs no safer than passenger cars for children, new study

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PartNew research from The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia shows that children riding in SUVs have similar injury risks to children who ride in passenger cars. The study, published today in the journal *Pediatrics*, found that an SUV's increased risk of rolling over during a crash offset the safety benefits associated with larger, heavier-weight vehicles.

The study, part of an ongoing research collaboration of Children's Hospital and State Farm Insurance Companies, looked at crashes reported to State Farm involving 3,933 child occupants between the ages of 0 and 15 years who were in either SUVs or passenger cars that were

model year 1998 or newer. Rollover contributes significantly to risk of injury in both vehicle types and occurred twice as frequently in SUVs. Children involved in rollover crashes were three times more likely to be injured than children in non-rollovers.

Children who were not properly restrained in a car seat, booster seat or seatbelt during an SUV rollover were at a 25-fold greater risk for injury as compared to appropriately restrained children. Nearly half of the unrestrained children in these crashes (41 percent) suffered a serious injury versus only 3 percent of appropriately restrained children in SUVs. Overall, injury risk for appropriately restrained children in passenger cars is less than 2 percent.

"SUVs are becoming more popular as family vehicles because they can accommodate multiple child safety seats and their larger size may lead parents to believe SUVs are safer than passenger cars," said Dennis Durbin, MD, M.S.C.E., an emergency physician and clinical epidemiologist at Children's Hospital, and co-author on the study.

"However, people who use an SUV as their family vehicle should know that SUVs do not provide superior protection for child occupants and that age- and size -appropriate restraints and rear seating for children under 13 years are critically important because of the increased risk of a rollover crash."

In the 2005 Partners for Child Passenger Safety Fact and Trend Report, Children's Hospital reported that SUVs in child-involved State Farm crashes increased from 15 percent in 1999 to 26 percent in 2004, while the percentage of passenger cars decreased from a high of 54 percent in 1999 to 43 percent in 2004. There was no or little growth in the percentage of minivans in the study population – 24 percent in 2004.

"We want parents to be able to make fully informed decisions regarding the choice of vehicle for their family," says Lauren Daly, M.D., co-

author of the study. "Ideally, a safe family car has enough rear-row seating positions with lap-and-shoulder belts for every child under 13 that requires them, and enough remaining rear-row positions to install child safety seats for infants and toddlers."

Previous Children's Hospital research has shown that, within each vehicle classification, larger heavier vehicles are generally safer. For instance, of all passenger car classifications, large and luxury cars feature lower child injury risk than mid-size or small passenger cars. Among SUVs, mid-size and small SUVs had similar injury risks, which were two times higher than large SUVs. Compact extended-cab pickup trucks present a unique risk to children -- child occupants in the rear row of compact extended cab pick-ups face a five-fold increased risk of injury in a crash as compared to rear-seated children in all other vehicle types.

Parents who are unsure of how to choose and install car safety seats or booster seats can visit www.chop.edu/carseat to find educational videos and information, or they can locate a certified child passenger safety technician in their community who will teach them how to install the seat properly.

Source: Children's Hospital of Philadelphia

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