



JPMA Statement: Useful Life of Car Seats

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Common questions from parents and caregivers revolve around the useful life periods and expiration dates for car seats. Older car seats may not provide as much protection. In fact, most state child restraint laws expressly require proper use of these safety devices, and manufacturer instructions for proper use require adherence to expiry policies. To help consumers understand the reasons car seats have limited lifespans, JPMA and its manufacturer members offer the following explanation.

Car seats and booster seats are safety devices designed to protect children from crash forces, and they have limited useful lives identified by their manufacturers. Consumers must not use children's car seats or booster seats beyond their stated useful life or expiry dates to avoid potential risks that could lead to less than optimal performance. Most state and provincial laws require proper use of these devices in accordance with manufacturer instructions, and these instructions include statements of useful life.

Some of the considerations manufacturers use to determine a model's useful life include:

- **Crash history** - A car seat or booster seat is designed to provide protective benefits in a single moderate to severe crash, and then must be replaced. Even a minor crash can cause some damage. Knowing and remembering the full history of a car seat or booster seat and permanently discarding a seat that has been in a crash is important to the safety of the child. Check manufacturer instructions for replacement guidance.

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- **Regulatory changes** - All car seats and booster seats must meet stringent performance standards. With new research these safety regulations continue to improve, and manufacturers make appropriate changes to ensure compliance. Regulations are not retroactive, and seats that are beyond their useful life may not offer the same protective benefits.
- **Voluntary improvements** - In addition to regulatory changes, car seat and booster manufacturers voluntarily improve designs to provide additional safety benefits. While current models include these improvements, expired car seats and boosters may not.
- **Missing or damaged parts** - Car seats have many functional parts, and over time some parts may become damaged or lost. Their components are exposed to environmental factors like food, drinks, dirt, debris, cleaners and other contaminants that may degrade the car seat's effectiveness.
- **Labels and instructions** - To fully benefit from car seats and boosters, instructions must be followed and the required labels must be legible. Over time, regular use of these devices may result in lost instructions or damaged labels. In addition, instructions and labels are often changed or improved based on research and field performance.

Consult your manufacturer instructions to learn the useful life of your car seat.

A car seat or booster seat that has reached its stated useful life should be permanently disposed of so it cannot be reused by other families. Prior to disposing of or recycling the car seat, remove the padding, cut the harnesses and label the plastic shell with a permanent marker as, "Expired. Do not use."