Transportation for Infants, Children and Youth with Special Needs

Questions & Answers, Resources & Links

Helping British Columbia professionals understand their role, advise parents and access Canadian resources and links.

Keeping all children safe when riding in vehicles is important for everyone!
This document is designed primarily for professionals in British Columbia, Canada.

Bookmark it, don’t print it! This document is designed to be viewed on-line because of the extensive use of links.

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(Links updated 2016)

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1. Where do I start?

- British Columbia Auto Association (BCAA) Child Passenger Safety Program website. This site includes easy-to-understand information on Child Passenger Safety from birth to age 9, translated documents and more. Information is accurate and complete based on BC laws.

- Parachute Canada, a nation-wide charitable organization dedicated to preventing injuries and saving lives. This site includes extensive information on car safety seats for example: installation video, car safety seat terms, links to national and provincial laws (unfortunately BC provincial laws are not complete on this site) and more.

Where do I start with the parents of my patient or client?

Parents need to know their child’s:

- Age
- Weight
- Height

Parents need to:

- Read the specifications on car safety seat to match the child to the seat.

- Check if they are using the right car safety seat. This document outlines minimum standards by law, not what might be considered best practice. Encourage parents to exceed minimum standards.

- Trial the car safety seat before purchase.
2. Infant pre-term or low birth weight: What do I need to know?

- Infant seats specify a minimum and a maximum infant height and weight limit. Minimum limits vary between infant seats; advise parents to choose an infant seat with the lowest minimum weight limit and the shortest distance between the seat and first shoulder strap harness slot.

- Advise parents to properly position their infant in the safety seat.
  
  *Car Seat Safety, Fraser Health 2013*
  
  *First Ride, Safe Ride BCCH 2010*

- Professionals in hospital may assess the infant’s tolerance to sitting in the seat prior to discharge. This is sometimes called a “car seat challenge”. The purpose is to assess, in hospital, the infant’s ability to manage (i.e.: respiration, secretion management or other issues) while sitting in the infant seat for a length of time. There are no specific best practice criteria for this assessment and it will vary from hospital to hospital.

3. What modifications can I make to accommodate a child with special needs in a car safety seat?

*Always follow the manufacturer’s instructions for installation and use, both for the safety seat and vehicle. Safety seats are designed to work the way they are manufactured.*
Can Do for Posture Issues (low or high muscle tone):

- Lateral support along the trunk and side of the head using tightly rolled receiving blankets, rolled towels or pool noodles cut to the right shape and fit under the car safety set upholstery. Make sure the upholstery continues to fit.

- Place a small rolled blanket or towel under the knees to increase/change hip flexion. Hip flexion can help to reduce sliding forward in the seat. Only put the roll under the knees not the thighs or buttocks, see notes in “Can Not Do” section for details.

Can Do for Head Control Issues (respiration and secretion management):

- Lateral support along the trunk and side of the head using tightly rolled receiving blankets, rolled towels or pool noodles cut to the right shape and fit under the car safety set upholstery. Make sure the upholstery continues to fit.

- A soft foam collar with sockinette cover can help with head control. Only soft foam collars are recommended and only used if needed. Consult a therapist.

Can Do for Behavioural Issues (opening the seat belt or other disruptive behavior):

- Use a safety seat with a 5 point harness as long as possible, upper weight limits for harness wear varies among manufactures. Always follow the manufacturer’s instructions for harness use.

- Consider a special needs car seat either a 5 point harness or the E-2-On vest for children who have outgrown commercial seats.

- Consider a buckle guard if opening the seat belt is a safety issue.

- Use a social or personalized story/story boards to augment communication of expected behavior when travelling.

Can NOT Do:

- Do not use blankets, extra padding, bunting bags or bulky clothes behind/under the child or between the child and the harness. In a crash, these materials compress allowing the harness to become too loose to properly secure the child.

- Do not modify the seat belt. Items that alter the fit or effectiveness of the harness or seat belt could cause injury to the child.

- Transport Canada Consumer Information Notice (Transport Canada 2004)
4. Do I need a special car safety seat or other equipment?  
How do I access it?

- Most infant, children and youth with special needs do not need specialized equipment. Commercially available products typically suffice.
- Below is a summary of the most common special needs equipment and relevant links for your information, this is not an exhaustive list.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equipment</th>
<th>Product / Manufacturer</th>
<th>Additional Information: Weight/Height of child</th>
<th>How to access?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Car Beds</td>
<td>Cosco Dream Ride (Dorel)</td>
<td>Weight: 2.3 – 9 kg (5 – 20 lb) Length: 48 – 66 cm (19 – 26&quot;)</td>
<td>• Discuss options with neonatal intensive care staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HOPE Car Bed (Merritt Manufacturing)</td>
<td>(4.5 – 35 lb)</td>
<td>• Contact BCCH or Sunny Hill Health Centre Occupational Therapy Departments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Needs Car Seats: manufacturer is listed first followed by the name of the seat(s)</td>
<td>Snug Seat Pilot</td>
<td>Pilot-Booster Seat 40 – 120 lb, no height specified</td>
<td>• Contact a pediatric therapist (OT or PT) • Medical equipment supplier</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|                                     | Snug Seat Hippo Designed for infants and young children in hip spica casts | Rear-facing weight limit including cast: 2.3 – 15 kg (5 – 33 lb)  
Forward-facing weight limit including cast: 9 – 29.5 kg (20 – 65 lb) | • Hospital loaner program (BC Children’s Hospital, Royal Columbian Hospital New Westminster, Victoria General Hospital) |
|                                     | Columbia Medical Car Seats               | Forward Facing 2000: 20 – 102 lb and up to 60" height  
2500: 40 – 130 lb and 54 – 66" height  
2400: 25 – 130 lb and up to 66" height | • Contact a pediatric therapist (OT or PT) • Medical equipment supplier |
<p>|                                     | TheraPedic 2000                          |                                                                                                             |                                                     |
|                                     | TheraPedic 2500                          |                                                                                                             |                                                     |
|                                     | 2400 Spirit APS                          |                                                                                                             |                                                     |</p>
<table>
<thead>
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</thead>
</table>
| Vests                     | E-Z-On vests           | The manufacturer has a variety of sizes for sitting and lying positions. The manufacturer is US based and some products are not easily available to the BC customers. The Canadian distributor is Perry Rand Transportation Group Ltd. | • Contact a pediatric therapist (OT or PT)  
  • Medical equipment supplier                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Soft Neck Collars         | Foam covered with cotton stockinet | Neck collars vary in length and width (i.e. height from chin to chest).                                                                                                                                                               | • Contact your therapist (OT or PT)  
  • Large drug stores may have a limited selection  
  • Medical supply stores will have a larger selection and the ability to special order a specific size                                                                                                                                 |
| Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles | Vehicle wheelchair lifts and ramps  
  Wheelchair tie down systems  
  Passenger shoulder/lap seat belts | Conversions involve changing a van to accommodate and secure a wheelchair.  
  The wheelchair tie-down system secures the wheelchair to the vehicle.  
  The passenger rides in the wheelchair, restrained by a shoulder/lap seat belt.  
  The shoulder/lap seat belt is anchored in the vehicle and is buckled up after the wheelchair is “tied down”.  
  Click for an information document that describes how to travel safely in a motor vehicle while seated in a wheelchair. | • Some BC medical supply stores do van conversions  
  • They can help with sourcing a vans and are familiar with different tie down systems (link to list of dealers)  
  • Consult with OT/PT for overall guidance regarding the process, products and funding.                                                                                                                                 |
| Wheelchair Tie Downs      | Method of securing the wheelchair to the van | Examples of a “tie down” system include a “docking system” or a “strap system” such as those found from these manufactures: Sure Lok  
  Q’Straint  
  EZ lock | • Consult a medical equipment dealer familiar with van conversions for advice and a tie down system that will meet your needs and budget.  
  • Consult with OT/PT for overall guidance regarding the process, products and funding. |
5. What about travel in a stroller or wheelchair in the vehicle?

- **Best practice** is for a child to travel in a safety seat on the vehicle seat until he/she outgrows the car safety seat specifications. There are no specific BC laws about the age or weight or height of a child to ride in a special needs stroller or wheelchair.

- **How to access a wheelchair accessible parking pass?** Applications are available from SPARC BC.

- **Best practice** is to use "transport ready" equipment. Most new special needs strollers and wheelchairs comply with W/C-19 and are transport ready (i.e. used as a seat in a vehicle).
• What is W/C 19? W/C 19 is a voluntary standard for manufacturers to design, test and label a wheelchair (and/or stroller) for use as a seat in a motor vehicle. [Section 19 of American National Standards Institute/Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America (ANSI/RESNA) Wheelchair Standards, Volume1, Wheelchair for use as Seats in Motor Vehicles (WC 19) 2000.]

• When a child travels in a wheelchair in a vehicle, follow best practice safety tips (Sunny Hill 2012).

• Secure both the wheelchair or stroller and the passenger separately using their respective seat belt systems. Safe Ride Document (University of Michigan, 2010).

• Confirm who is responsible for securing the seatbelt on the passenger when using taxis. It is the taxi drivers’ responsibility to tie down the wheelchair and make the seatbelt available. The seatbelt for the wheelchair passenger must be used. Who actually puts the seat belt on the child or youth should be decided by and, if possible, supervised by the guardian or caregiver. Accessible Transportation in BC Report 2012.
Parents typically make the decision when and how their child will travel. The following are some of the questions to ask prior to purchasing a wheelchair accessible vehicle:

- Regarding the child's needs: Are the child's current and future physical and equipment needs being considered? Can the child transfer to a seat? Will the child use a power wheelchair?
- Regarding parent’s needs: Will it accommodate current and future family needs? Can the parent drive it? Are the initial expenses, gas, insurance and on-going expenses affordable?
- Is there a transportation plan in place for a student who travels in a wheelchair?

Before the parents make a vehicle purchase encourage them to consult with their child’s therapist and a medical equipment dealer who provides and modifies vehicles. Below is a list of BC medical equipment dealers:

- Advanced Mobility
- Can Am Mobility
- City Wide Scooter and Wheelchairs
- Creative Mobility Products Inc.
- Medichair
- Motion Specialties (Centric Health in Victoria)
- PG Surg-Med Ltd.
- Shoppers Home Health Care Automotive
- Sidewinder
6. What are the options when wearing casts?

Casts that typically interfere with transportation are body casts, hip spica casts or long leg casts. This document on hip spica covers a number of issues including transportation. If surgery is known in advance, encourage parents to discuss a transportation plan with:

- Orthopedic clinic team members (doctor, therapist, nurse).
- Community rehabilitation team (occupational or physical therapist).

After surgery you need to know and sort out

- The child’s weight with the cast on.
- Can the child use his/her pre-surgery equipment i.e.: child safety seat, the vehicle seat or wheelchair?
- A vehicle seat or wheelchair cannot be reclined more than 30 degrees from upright during travel.
- Hospitals may loan equipment, i.e. the Hippo Car Seat for younger children or an EZ-on vest for older children.
- The child or youth may need to be transported home and to hospital via Special Needs Transport or ambulance.
- A long leg cast may be accommodated by resting on the centre console from sitting in the back middle or on a folded down seat directly in front of the passenger with the cast.
- Some costs for the family may be associated with transportation.
- Sometimes a commercially available car seat will work; take measurements of your child’s width at the hips and knees and angles of these joints in the cast. Compare to the car seat. Check on line or in person at stores that have a large variety of seats such as: T J Kiddies Store or Toys R Us or other store of your choice.
7. What is a “Student Transportation Plan”? And where can I find one?

A transportation plan assists professionals and family members involved with a student to plan, to understand and to implement strategies for safe transportation. Below is one example of a student transportation plan specifically designed for BC students and for professionals. This 3 page plan includes blue-font footnotes on best practice, live links to BC laws and other informative notes. It is a fillable on-line document and easily printed and attached to an Individual Education Plan.

8. What are the roles of BC professionals regarding transportation?

In Alphabetical Order

**Child Passenger Safety (CPS) Educators**

**Education**  Trained in child passenger safety, some educators have additional training in special needs transportation.

**Role**  Provide information and support for parents, caregivers and professionals.

- Provide education to the public on fitting a child into a car seat and installing the car seat in a vehicle.
- Support CPS education by offering information workshops, instructional clinics, hands-on workshops, new parent workshops, public awareness campaigns and enforcement initiatives.

More information or how to contact:

**Infant Development Program (IDP) Worker**

**Role**
- Assist families of children (birth to 3 years) who have or may be at risk of a developmental delay.
- Work in partnership with other community professionals.
- Connect families and caregivers to community resources (i.e. pediatric physiotherapist).

**Medical Equipment Dealer**

**Role**
- Work in collaboration with therapists and family members.
- May have access to special needs child car seats for demonstration.
- Provide manufacturer information to families on how to use special needs equipment when equipment is purchased.
- Provide information regarding wheelchair accessible vans and provide quotes for funding applications.
- May source, adapt or modify and train users regarding wheelchair accessible vans/vehicles.

**More information or how to contact:**
See links to dealers in Question #5.

**Nurse, Registered Nurse (RN) or Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN)**

**Role**
- Part of a team that assesses an infant’s ability to tolerate being positioned in a car seat, sometimes called a “car seat challenge.”
- May liaise with families and school districts.
- May work with school staff to identify issues and help develop an Individual Education Plan (IEP).
- May provide one-to-one nursing care of medically complex children and therefore travelling to and from school or health centres with a child in a private vehicle, taxi or school bus.

**More information or how to contact:**
Hospitals, Public Health Units
School Districts, Health Centres, private nursing companies
**Occupational Therapist (OT)**

**Role**
- Knowledgeable about medical conditions and disabilities and the impact these may have on individual and family members’ participation in activities.
- Complete individualized physical, developmental and environmental assessments.
- Problem solve with caregivers and school staff regarding the child’s specific equipment needs.
- Advise parents and other team members regarding individualized transportation strategies.
- Provide advice about postural and behavioural support.
- Can prescribe and write letters of justification/medical necessity for specific equipment (i.e. special needs car seats, neck collars).

**More information or how to contact:**
- Sunny Hill Health Centre for Children
- BC Children’s Hospital
- BC Child Development Centres
- School Districts and Health Units
- Infant Development Programs
- Private Consultants

**Parents and legal guardians**

**Role**
- Seek information and support from the appropriate resources
- Purchase or arrange the purchase of the appropriate seat.
- Review the child car seat instructions and vehicle owner’s manual instructions.
- Request a referral to a therapist if their child needs postural support or has complex medical needs.
- Communicate their child’s transportation needs to everyone who transports the child.
- Secure the child in and out of their child car seat or wheelchair in vans, taxis, school buses and public transit.
Physiotherapist

Role
- Knowledgeable about medical conditions and disabilities and the impact these may have on individual and family members’ participation in activities
- Complete individualized physical and developmental assessments.
- Problem solve with caregivers and school staff regarding the child’s specific equipment needs.
- Advise parents and other team members regarding individualized transportation strategies.
- Provide advice about postural support.
- Can prescribe and write letters of justification/medical necessity for specific equipment (i.e. special needs car seats, neck collars).

More information or how to contact:
- Sunny Hill Health Centre for Children
- BC Children’s Hospital
- BC Child Development Centres
- School Districts and Health Units
- Infant Development Programs
- Private Consultants

Rehabilitation Assistant at BC Children’s Hospital

Education
Educated as rehabilitation assistant and has additional training in Child Passenger Safety

Role
- Educate parents and fit children for use the special needs car seats at BC Children's Hospital.
- Run the loaner program at BCCH.

More information or how to contact:
BC Children’s Hospital Occupational Therapy Department 604-875-2123
**Physician**

Role
- Assess the medical stability of the infant or child in relation to transportation.
- Consult with others who are knowledgeable about special needs transportation to make final decisions.
- Authorize the medical necessity of transportation.
- May write letters of medical necessity for specific situations.

**More information or how to contact:**
Hospitals, Physician office

**School Staff**

Role
- Develop and carry out an individual education plan which may include the student’s transportation plan to get to and from school.
- Secure the student in and out of a taxi, school bus and/or public transit when a student is being transported to and from school, field trips and other outings.

**More information or how to contact:**
Schools, school district offices

**Social Worker**

Role
- Assist, advocate and support families with referrals to medical, community and financial resources.
- Help families to navigate through the social and medical care systems.
- May be the legal guardian if a child is in the care of the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD).

**More information or how to contact:**
Hospitals
Ministry of Children and Family Development
Child Development Centres
9. What are the specific BC laws related to infants and children with special needs?

Infants and children with special needs follow the same laws as all children in BC. This is not a comprehensive list related to special needs transportation. These Divisions from the BC Motor Vehicle Act Regulations are selected as relevant to the topic of infant, child and youth transportation.

Child Seating and Restraint Systems including exemptions - Motor Vehicle Act Regulations (MVAR) - Division 36 This hyperlink goes to Division 35, use the scroll bar on the right side of the window to scroll down to Division 36.

Road Safety - Restraint requirements for designated seating positions including exemptions - Motor Vehicle Regulations (MVAR) - Division 39 This hyperlink goes to Division 37, use the scroll bar on the right side of the window to scroll down to Division 36.

Mobility Aid Accessible Taxi Standards - Motor Vehicle Act Regulations (MVAR) - Division 44

10. My question is not answered here, who do I contact?

- Sunny Hill Heath Centre for Children, Therapy Department at 604-453-8300 or at 1-888-300-3088 (toll free in British Columbia).