

Exclusive Survey:
**THE 10
SAFEST STATES
FOR KIDS**

From school buses to streets, playgrounds to pools, how well does your state protect its children from injury? In the first investigation of its kind, *Child* maps out which states are most and least dangerous for kids.

By Karen Cicero • Photography by Annie Schlechter





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hortly after Zoe Weekley celebrated her fourth birthday, her mother, Stephanie, asked Missouri police officers how to secure Zoe in the car now that she was outgrowing her child safety seat. They told her that Zoe should ride in the back with her seat belt buckled. So Weekley followed their guidance—and two months later when the family’s Pontiac convertible was hit on the side by another

vehicle traveling at least 65 miles per hour, both Zoe and her 6-year-old brother, Brendon, sustained major internal injuries. “Zoe lost two-thirds of her colon and needed to wear a colostomy bag for months, while Brendon had two collapsed lungs, numerous fractured ribs, and a bruised liver and kidneys,” recalls their grandmother, Pamela Lape, a school nurse. “The doctors at the children’s hospital where they were treated told us that most of their injuries weren’t caused by the car crash per se but by the seat belt that was restraining them.”

Automobile manufacturers design and place seat belts according to adult proportions, so when kids get too big for their toddler car seat but still haven’t reached 4’9” tall and 80 pounds, they need to be elevated in a booster seat to make sure their seat belt is properly positioned. Just weeks after the crash—when the Weekleys were still immersed in taking care of their kids—Lape and her husband spoke out about the need for a booster-seat law in their state. It took five years, but their persistence and later an event featuring the kids themselves, who have now fully recovered, helped in the passage of Missouri’s booster-seat legislation in June.

The Rest of the Nation Don’t see your state in the top 10? Find out how it ranked.

● 11 Vermont ● 12 Maryland ● 13 North Dakota ● 14 Indiana ● 15 West Virginia ● 16 Oregon ● 17 Hawaii ● 18 Delaware

But 12 states still *don’t* have a booster-seat law. Thirty *don’t* require kids to wear helmets while riding bikes. And a startling 46 states *don’t* require fencing around residential swimming pools.

To see where your kids are the safest, *Child* embarked on a six-month review of every state, considering protection from both accidents and violence—the first analysis of its kind to combine the two. In all, we examined more than 55 criteria, including crime rates; the number of police officers and firefighters per capita; the availability and quality of emergency-medicine doctors and trauma centers; childhood-injury rates; booster-seat, bike-helmet, and window-guard laws; school-bus-crossing safety issues; the quality of the playgrounds; protection from sex offenders; and much more. What we found: While no state does a perfect job of protecting children, some are far better at it than others. Read how our winners keep their youngest residents secure, and go to www.child.com/web_links to visit *Child’s* Interactive Safety Center.

1 RHODE ISLAND

🚦 Improved the safety of its playgrounds from 2000 to 2004, enhancing their age-appropriate design, fall surfacing, and maintenance

👉 Has minimized transportation-related deaths; its rate among children ages 18 and under is about half the national average



PROP STYLIST: KATE MCCANN FOR MARNIE ROSE AGENCY. GROOMING: DINA KINION FOR R.J. BENNETT REPRESENTS. TRAFFIC SIGNS (OPENER AND THIS PAGE) AVAILABLE AT GUIDECRAFT.COM.



➤ **Boasts the nation's highest percentage of prescriptions routed electronically, an important step in safeguarding families against medication errors; by the end of 2007, the state hopes to have all pharmacies capable of accepting electronic prescriptions and two-thirds of doctors using the technology**

The smallest state in the nation finished first in our ranking—not only because it offers an array of comprehensive laws to protect kids but also because it's been among the first states to enact them. In 2001 Rhode Island began requiring children to wear helmets when riding scooters, and that same year it mandated booster seats for kids 6 and under who had outgrown their toddler car seat—long before most other states were considering plans. “Our state uses its size to its advantage,” says Elizabeth Burke Bryant, executive director of Rhode Island Kids Count, an advocacy group. “Because we’re small, legislators, doctors, and parents can more easily communicate.”

The latest example of what Burke Bryant describes as “a can-do spirit

when it comes to protecting kids”: In June, Gov. Donald L. Carcieri signed legislation requiring a 25-year sentence for first-degree child molesters and lifetime electronic monitoring of them after their release from prison. Next year he hopes to take the law one step further. Says Carcieri: “We want to enhance the public-notification system for all first-degree child molesters. Parents should not have to wonder who is living next door to them.”

2 CONNECTICUT

➤ **Requires both safety education for boaters and the use of personal flotation devices while boating for children under age 12**

➤ **Is one of the five states that made the most school-bus-crossing safety improvements recommended by the National Transportation Safety Board**

➤ **Will mandate, beginning in late 2008, that all healthcare institutions annually report infections that patients acquire in their facilities to the state's department of public health, a major step forward in patient safety**

When kids in Connecticut returned to school this fall, it was the first time each district had a formal plan to keep students who have life-threatening food allergies safe. “Parents are hugely relieved because they no longer have to convince school personnel to take these allergies very seriously,” says Anne Muñoz-Furlong, founder of the Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network in Fairfax, VA.

Last year, Connecticut legislator Demetrios Giannaros enlisted the help of Muñoz-Furlong's group to co-sponsor a bill requiring the development of statewide guidelines that local districts must use to craft their own plans. The guidelines call for training school personnel to administer life-saving medications, outlining protocols to prevent exposure to food allergens, and more. In the end, Connecticut became the second state in the nation to have a law addressing food allergies in schools. Massachusetts was the first,

● 19 Virginia ● 20 Wisconsin ● 21 Colorado ● 22 North Carolina ● 23 Washington ● 24 Ohio ● 25 Iowa ● 26 Missouri

and most recently Tennessee and Vermont have passed bills.

3 NEW JERSEY

🚑 Offers six pediatric trauma centers that have been verified by the American College of Surgeons, more than any other state except Ohio, Massachusetts, and Minnesota

🚗 Expanded in July a law requiring the installation and maintenance of window guards in multifamily housing units

🟢 Has significantly reduced the number of severe injuries on amusement park rides in



recent years, becoming the first state to regulate acceleration requirements and implement certification programs by ride type; it's even worked with manufacturers to develop the first industry standards for safe-ride design

New Jersey students are more likely to be buckling up on school buses than kids elsewhere in the country. Nearly every big yellow bus in the Garden State is equipped with seat belts, thanks to a law passed in 1992 requiring them on all new school vehicles.

California, Florida, Louisiana, and New York also stipulate the presence of seat belts on at least some buses. But New Jersey was the first state demanding that kids buckle up, says Mark Marino, operations manager of New Jersey's Motor Vehicle Commission.

4 NEW YORK

🚑 Is one of five states that ban consumer fireworks; Delaware, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Rhode Island are the others

🚗 In 2003, became the first state to require that all cigarettes sold be "fire-safe," less likely to ignite if dropped or discarded carelessly; now California, Illinois, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont have similar laws

🟢 In June, awarded nearly \$1 million in grants to improve health and safety issues in the state's childcare facilities

New York used to have one of the highest crime rates in the U.S. But between 1994 and 2004, violent crime fell 52% and overall crime plunged 45%. "Now we're the safest highly populated state, but we want to be the safest state—period," says Chauncey Parker, New York's director of criminal justice.

To accomplish that goal, Parker says, the state will continue to calculate crime statistics monthly, a move that has proven to be extremely successful in helping officials make timely strategic decisions about where to allocate resources. In July, New York enacted legislation authorizing local police to post online both high-risk and moderate-risk sex offenders living in the community. Plus, through Operation Safe Child, parents can obtain free cards with their child's photo, biographical details, and fingerprints. "The information can be electronically sent to every police officer and toll booth in the state should a child become missing," says Parker.

5 MASSACHUSETTS

🚑 Has the lowest rate of unintentional-injury deaths for newborns to 12-year-olds of any state; the national average is nearly three times higher

👨‍⚕️ Boasts the highest rate of board-certified emergency-medicine doctors of all the states in our 10-best list

🟢 Has very strong gun-safety laws, requiring that all firearms be locked when stored, that locking devices be sold with guns, and that residents be at least 21 years old to own a handgun or assault weapon

Last November, Massachusetts legislators helped create something positive in the aftermath of a tragedy when they passed a bill requiring that most homes in the state be equipped with an alarm

BEST & WORST BY CATEGORY

Discover which states are winners and which are losers on five key child-safety issues. States are listed in descending order of ranking within the category.

ACCIDENTAL-INJURY DEATH RATES FOR KIDS AGES 12 & UNDER

Best: Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, and Rhode Island
Worst: Mississippi, Alaska, South Dakota, Wyoming, and Arkansas

BOOSTER-SEAT LAWS

Best: Tennessee and Wyoming require kids as old as age 8 to ride in a booster seat.
Worst: Alaska, Arizona, Florida, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Ohio, South Dakota, Texas, and Utah have no booster-seat requirements.

PERCENTAGE OF BOARD-CERTIFIED EMERGENCY-MEDICINE DOCTORS

Best: Hawaii, Alaska, Colorado, Massachusetts, and Maine
Worst: South Dakota, Iowa, Alabama, Arkansas, and Nebraska

NUMBER OF SEX OFFENDERS PER CAPITA

Best: Pennsylvania, Maryland, Connecticut, New Mexico, and New York
Worst: Alaska, Utah, Montana, Delaware, and Michigan

VIOLENT CRIME RATE

Best: North Dakota, Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, and South Dakota
Worst: South Carolina, Florida, Maryland, Tennessee, and New Mexico

● 27 Nebraska ● 28 Florida ● 29 Georgia ● 30 Idaho ● 31 Montana ● 32 Kansas ● 33 Oklahoma ● 34 Tennessee



that sounds when carbon monoxide reaches dangerous levels. The colorless, odorless gas is responsible for thousands of ER visits and about 500 unintentional deaths annually in the U.S. Among its victims in January 2005 was 7-year-old Plymouth resident Nicole Garofalo. Snow blocked a heating vent in her family's home, and the resulting carbon monoxide made Garofalo, her brother, and her pregnant mother lose consciousness in their sleep. Her mom and brother recovered, though her mom suffered a miscarriage.

Within days of the second-grader's funeral, lawmakers were drafting "Nicole's Law," which required a carbon monoxide detector—a \$20 to \$50 investment—on every habitable floor of most homes in the state. Seven other states had passed laws mandating carbon monoxide detectors before Massachusetts, but most applied just to new homes. Minnesota will require these detectors starting in 2007 for new homes and in 2008 for existing ones.

6 ILLINOIS

🔴 Has the strongest law governing the sale of and notification about recalled children's products in the U.S., levying fines of up to \$500 per day

🟡 Is among the nine states with the highest playground-safety scores from the National Program for Playground Safety

🟢 Has met the 54 national standards outlined by the Emergency Management Accreditation Program; Arizona, Florida, Montana, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, and Virginia are the only other states to have done so

As the father of two daughters, ages 10 and 3, Gov. Rod Blagojevich of Illinois has made it a goal to enact child-safety legislation

since he was sworn into office. Among his accomplishments: requiring the use of a booster seat through age 7, doubling the amount of behind-the-wheel training teen drivers need in order to receive a license, and mandating that all paroled sex offenders be monitored by a GPS tracking system. Says Blagojevich: "Keeping kids safe is difficult, and we're trying to help parents however we can."

7 MAINE

🔴 Has the second-lowest violent-crime rate in the U.S. (only North Dakota's rate is better) and the sixth-lowest rate of property crime

🟡 Is the first state to mandate that pharmaceutical companies post clinical-drug-trial data online, enhancing patient safety

🟢 Boasts one of the strongest booster-seat laws in the country, requiring them for children up to age 8 and less than 80 pounds

Bullying and harassment should be much less of a problem for Maine students this year, thanks to a law that made each school board adopt formal policies on the subject by September. "Previously some schools had policies, but they were so disparate in how they defined—or even if they defined—what bullying is," says Rep. Carol Grose, who sponsored the legislation. The bill, passed in July 2005, created training programs for teachers and staff, online tools, and model policies each school could use to tailor its own.

8 PENNSYLVANIA

🔴 Is hiring 316 state troopers, bringing the total to 4,660—the most permitted by law

🟡 Boasts excellent emergency care for kids, being the only state to have two children's hospitals in the top 10 of *Child's* ranking of pediatric centers in 2005

🟢 Has the fewest registered sex offenders per capita of any state; Alaska has the most Since 1991, Pennsylvania has made it illegal to leave a child under age 6 unattended in a car for even a few moments, with violators being punished by up to 90 days in prison and/or a fine of up to

● 35 Minnesota ● 36 Kentucky ● 37 Wyoming ● 38 Michigan ● 39 Texas ● 40 Nevada ● 41 South Carolina ● 42 Utah

LITTLE-KNOWN SAFETY THREATS TO YOUNG KIDS

You realize your child needs to wear a helmet while riding a bike and be buckled into a safety seat in a car. But experts alert you to often-overlooked dangers:

ELEVATORS About 1,900 kids are injured annually in elevators—with 1- to 2-year-olds having the highest rate of any age group, according to a recent study from Columbus Children's Research Institute. The most common cause of an accident: closing of the elevator door on a child's arm, leg, or head. Hold your young child's hand when entering and leaving an elevator.

GAS CONTAINERS The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates that 1,270 children are treated in emergency rooms annually because of injuries from opening gas cans. Because they're sold empty, the law doesn't require them to have child-resistant caps, so store yours out of your child's reach. Go to www.child.com/web_links to learn more about the Children's Gasoline Burn Prevention Act, federal legislation that would require all portable gas containers to be made with child-resistant closures.


SLEDS Riding a sled sent 41,272 kids to the ER in the winter of 2001–02, and not just for bumps and bruises. Nearly 10% of the kids sustained a brain injury, according to a study by Brown Medical School in Providence. When your child is sledding, make sure he wears his bike helmet over a tight-fitting cap or hat.

WADING POOL DRAINS You may have heard former Secretary of State James Baker discussing the dangers associated with the drains of whirlpools. Four years ago, his 7-year-old granddaughter became trapped in one at a friend's house and died. But the biggest threat to kids from drains is actually in wading pools, says B.J. Fisher, president of the American Lifeguard Association. Because of the shallow water, kids can easily access the drain and may be interested in playing with the drain cover. Before you pay for your pool membership, ask whether the wading pool has a "safety vacuum release system," which automatically shuts off the suction when the drain is blocked. For more information on federal pool and spa legislation supported by Baker, go to www.child.com/web_links.

\$300. In July, the state went one better, considering it a separate offense for each child left in the car. "If you leave four young kids in the car alone, you could spend up to a year in prison, even if nothing happened to them," says Brandi Hunter-Davenport, communications manager for Gov. Edward Rendell. In the U.S., at least 509 children were left unattended in or near cars in 2005—and 151 of them died, according to Kids in Cars, an advocacy group. Only 14 states currently have laws addressing the problem.

9 NEW HAMPSHIRE


 Has a special unit to address child abuse; only 15 other states do


 Is one of 10 states in which the entire population is covered by enhanced 911 services, allowing operators to trace the origin of a call


 Lists online critical licensing violations at the state's childcare centers

"The most fundamental duty of state government is to protect the safety of our citizens," says Gov. John Lynch of New Hampshire, whose wife, Susan, is a pediatrician. In recent months, the governor signed legislation strengthening punishments for crimes against children, requiring a 25-year sentence for knowingly causing permanent bodily injury to a child or for preying sexually on a child under age 13. He's also enacted legislation that more easily allows social workers, mental health professionals, and attorneys to come together and advocate for abused children.

10 CALIFORNIA


 Boasts the fewest injuries requiring medical attention for kids ages 5 and under of any state; Washington has the highest injury rate

 Is one of only four states that mandate fencing around residential swimming pools; Arizona, Florida, and Oregon are the others

 Recently extended "The Safely Surrendered Baby Law," under which a parent can surrender a baby to local safety offices without being prosecuted

Traumatic brain injuries to California kids from bike accidents have dropped by 18% since 1994, when the state enacted a law requiring all cyclists under age 18 to wear a helmet. "Still, it's more likely not to have a statewide bike helmet law than to have one," says Alan Korn, director of public policy for Safe Kids Worldwide.

California got the ball rolling for bike safety in 1987, when it passed the first U.S. law requiring helmets for kids under 5 who were passengers on a bike. In 2003, it became one of the first states to require a helmet when using in-line skates, scooters, and skateboards. 

 Post a question about injury prevention on www.child.com/web_links from November 7 to 13, and an expert from Safe Kids Worldwide will answer it.

CHILD'S SAFETY ADVISERS: The following organizations and professionals contributed data, guidance, or both to this story: American Academy of Pediatrics, American College of Emergency Physicians, American College of Surgeons, Bicycle Helmet Safety Institute, Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Columbus Children's Research Institute, Emergency Management Accreditation Program, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network, Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, Kids in Cars, Kids in Danger, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, National Academy for State Health Policy, National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, National Coalition for School Bus Safety, National Electrical Manufacturers Association, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, National Program for Playground Safety, National Transportation Safety Board, Safe Kids Worldwide, Saferparks, U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Administration for Children & Families, and U.S. Fire Administration.

● 43 New Mexico ● 44 South Dakota ● 45 Louisiana ● 46 Arkansas 47 ● Alabama 48 ● Arizona 49 ● Alaska ● 50 Mississippi