

Back seat less safe: Australian study

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Adult risk ... but children still safer in back sea

Adults who ride in the back of new cars are at higher risk of serious injury during an accident than those in the front seat, new research has found.

A [Neuroscience Research Australia](#) study found that front seats have far outstripped back seats in terms of developing safety features over the last few decades.

“We could save more lives and prevent more injuries if we paid the same attention to the rear seat of cars as we have to the front seat,” says UNSW Associate Professor Lynne Bilston.

“We are calling for immediate improvements in [car](#) rear seat safety.”

Previous studies in older cars have shown that occupants sitting in the back seat were at lower risk of serious injury and death in crashes, says A/Professor Bilston.

“However, since the mid-1990s, front seats have improved enormously with airbags and better seatbelt designs in the front driver and passenger positions,” she says.

These safety features are often not included in the rear seat, even in newer cars, meaning the front seat is now relatively safer than the rear seat for

adult passengers.

While all adults in newer cars are relatively safer in the front seat, the effect is greater for [older adults](#). Children are still safer sitting in the rear seat.

A/Professor Bilston and colleagues compared the risk of injury to front and rear seat occupants in cars made between 1990 and 1996 with those travelling in newer cars.

They found that while newer cars are safer than older cars, significant reductions in head, thoracic and abdominal injuries were only seen in front seat occupants.

There are currently no regulations on how cars should be designed to protect rear seat occupants, A/Professor Bilston says.

“We are calling on the Government and crash test programs, such as the Australian New Car Assessment Program, to shift some of their focus to the rear seat,” she says.

Provided by University of New South Wales

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