

Child car seat safety tip: Skip puffy winter coats

January 25 2021



(HealthDay)—Puffy coats have their place, but it's not inside a car seat.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) offers a variety of tips for keeping your little ones safe and warm while traveling by car.

The first is to avoid dressing children in puffy coats or snowsuits before buckling them in, because [car seat](#) straps won't tighten enough. That creates a danger that the fluffy padding will flatten in the force of a crash and the youngster will slip from the seat and be thrown from the car. Puffy coats are not safe in a car seat or under a seat belt for someone of any age, the AAP said.

"Parents may not recognize the potential danger of buckling up a child who is wearing a puffy coat," said Dr. Sarah Denny, a pediatrician with expertise in injury prevention. "A car seat harness or belt needs to fit snugly enough so that you cannot pinch the straps of the car seat harness. A safer alternative is to drape a blanket or coat over the car straps."

The AAP offers additional tips, including staying warmer by storing the carrier portion of an infant seat indoors and packing extra socks, mittens and hats. If your child likes to suck his or her thumb, choose half-gloves with open fingers.

Dress your child in thin layers. This would include close-fitting layers, such as a long-sleeved body suit and tights or leggings, a warmer top and pants and, finally, a thin fleece jacket. Long underwear is a safe layering option in very cold weather, the experts said. Infants should wear one more layer than adults, so think about what you have on when you're planning baby's outfit.

Use a coat or blanket over car seat straps, but never use a car seat cover or other product that puts a layer under your child's body or between the child's body and the harness straps. Don't use sleeping bag inserts or stroller inserts because they haven't been crash-tested, the AAP warned.

Be sure harness straps are tight enough. If you can pinch the straps, the car seat harness needs to be tightened to fit snugly against your child's chest.

Also be sure to leave baby's face uncovered to avoid trapped air and re-breathing, the group advised in an AAP news release.

Pack a bag with extra blankets, dry clothing, hats, gloves and non-perishable snacks in your car in case of an emergency.

Get an early start, they suggested. This can help if the baby is uncooperative about being buckled in and can also give you extra time to get where you're going.

"Pediatricians can help answer parents' questions about car seats and how to properly use them," Denny said. "Just as you would use layers of clothes to keep your child warm, you can use layers of prevention to keep your child safe."

More information: The National Safety Council shares more [winter driving safety tips](#).

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Citation: Child car seat safety tip: Skip puffy winter coats (2021, January 25) retrieved 20 September 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-01-child-car-seat-safety-puffy.html>

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