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**STUDY CONDUCTED THROUGH THE GEORGIA INJURY PREVENTION
PROGRAM IDENTIFIES GAPS IN CHILD PASSENGER SAFETY**

Study shows need for more public education, better surveillance and expanded legislation

ATLANTA (GA) – Most people would be surprised to know that the greatest health risk for children is car crashes. Most people don't realize that seatbelts were not designed for children. Even more surprising, is the fact that the many of those injuries to children under 12 were because of being improperly restrained in a car seat or booster seat. Citing these facts, the Georgia Injury Prevention Section of the Department of Human Resources, Division of Public Health in collaboration with the CDC conducted a study that revealed that just car seats and seatbelts are not enough to adequately protect child passengers.

“We have the technology to keep children safe in cars we need to be sure people know the importance of booster seats, riding in the rear seat, and infants facing backward,” said Dr. Stuart Brown, acting director of public health. “These types of studies show the support at the community level not only for education but for legislation.”

This study was conducted to observe child passengers and collect information such as age, restraint use and seating position. The information was collected in May and June of 2001 at law enforcement checkpoints in 24 different counties in Georgia. The study observed 1858 children in 1221 different vehicles. Based on recommendations by the American Academy of Pediatrics and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration the study revealed: 56 percent of the children observed were inappropriately restrained and/or in the front seat position; 28 percent were infants who were in forward –facing child safety seats; 22 percent were infants placed in the front seat; 88 percent were 5-8 year olds restrained by seat belts alone; 6 percent were in size and age appropriate safety seats and 39 percent were 9 – 12 year olds riding in the

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front seat. If the same study were conducted using the existing Georgia passenger restraint surveillance system, 77 percent of the children improperly restrained or riding in the front seat would have been missed. In a similar comparison, Georgia's restraint law did not cover over 74 percent of the children in the study who were riding at risk.

“For us, this study has highlighted areas of improvement regarding educating the public about proper use of booster seats and car seats,” added Brown. “We must also address improvements to our surveillance system for monitoring improper child passenger safety practices.”

Legislation passed two years ago in Georgia that raised the age from 4 to 6 for children restrained by seat belts alone has had some impact, however, health officials maintain that stronger child restraint laws in addition to increased community interventions would greatly decrease the numbers of child motor vehicle injuries and deaths.

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