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Stroger Hospital car seat program helps protect more than 2,500 children

Using child safety restraints in cars dramatically increases survival rates in car accidents; 2009 totals top 2008

CHICAGO – Last year 2,500 children from all around the Chicagoland area were safe and sound thanks to a life-saving car seat program between Stroger Hospital – a Cook County Health and Hospitals System (CCHHS) affiliate – and the Illinois Department of Transportation.

The partnership, which is operated out of the Stroger Hospital Pediatric Unit, provides affordable infant car seats, seats for toddlers, and booster seats for older children to patients and community residents. The program offers car seats at the hospital for a reduced price, with savings of up to 50 percent over those sold in stores.

“The program has been very successful,” Hospital Program Director Pamela Booras said. “In 2009 we sold more than 2,500 car seats, which was an increase from 2008.”

While the program has been a success by almost any standard, an educational component is also required so that new parents know how to properly protect their children once they buy a car seat. Anyone purchasing a seat must watch a 20-minute instructional video, and then demonstrate how to properly install the seat.

Illinois Transportation Secretary Gary Hannig spoke of the important role education plays in the program. “Properly installing a child safety seat should not be a daunting process for parents,” said Secretary Hannig. “Our children are precious and parents and caregivers must have the access they need to properly install their child safety seats.”

“We want to do more than provide a car seat. We make sure parents know what to do with it once they reach the car. So many people just don’t understand the importance of car seats for not only infants, but all children,” Booras said.

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One such parent who does know the importance of using car seats for older children is David Dean, a father of three children born at Stroger Hospital. Mr. Dean recently returned to buy new car seats for two of his young children who were getting bigger.

“This was a must,” Dean said. “I’ve worked as a paramedic and have seen kids hurt in accidents who weren’t in car seats. Stroger Hospital is one of the places we would bring people.”

While it is important to use an age appropriate child car safety seat for your child, not all child safety seats are the same. The American Academy of Pediatrics website offers a number of suggestions for helping to ensure that you are picking the best product for your child, including:

- The best seat for your son or daughter is the one that is age and size appropriate, properly installed, and used correctly.
- Make sure that your child does not use the seat beyond the manufacturer’s recommended date for length of use.
- Make sure there are no visible flaws on the child safety seat and that none of its parts are missing.
- Check the car safety seat’s model number and manufacture date to make sure the product hasn’t been recalled.
- If the car safety seat is one that has been used in the past, make sure it was never involved in a moderate or serious auto accident.

A recent study American Journal of Public Health reports that using child safety restraints in cars dramatically reduces the chances that a child will die in an accident. The study found that the odds of a baby dying in an auto crash dropped by 75 percent with use of a child safety seat, while the mortality rate for older children dropped by 60 percent.

CCHHS oversees a comprehensive, integrated system of healthcare throughout Chicago and suburban Cook County through its hospitals, ambulatory and community health network clinics, public health department, correctional healthcare facility, and outpatient infectious disease center.

The CCHHS (formerly known as the Cook County Bureau of Health Services) is comprised of: John H. Stroger Jr. Hospital, Provident Hospital, Oak Forest Hospital, Cook County Department of Public Health, Cermak Health Services, the Ruth Rothstein CORE Center and the Ambulatory and Community Health Network (ACHN) health centers.