

The Center for Childhood Safety's Car Seat Distribution and Check-up Programs Evaluation Report Executive Summary

The Center for Childhood Safety (CCS) is in its third year of funding from the State of Illinois. During the first two years, CCS expanded and developed a number of injury prevention programs. Car seat safety has been a major emphasis. Staff developed several car seat programs that continue to evolve.

This report explores three of CCS's car seat safety programs using data from May, 1999, to February, 2000: the hospital and community based car seat class/distribution program, the Cradles to Classroom class/distribution program, and the car safety seat check-up program. The report clarifies (1) the populations served by these programs, (2) the educational needs of this population, and (3) recommends opportunities for growth and further exploration. The data relied on for this evaluation were collected on forms CCS routinely uses for their programs.

The major findings and recommendations include:

1. Parents continue to make "critical errors" when using car seats. When mistakes are made by parents, it is most likely that the mistake will be one of three
2. critical errors.
3. Based on this fact (and the knowledge assessment), the two areas that should become the focus of CCS education efforts are: transitions (from infant seat to toddler seat and from toddler seat to booster seat) and strap snugness (the adult strap holding the car seat in place and the harness straps holding the child in place).
4. Strap snugness is very subjective. It is thought that the car-seat-to-car instruction that the check-ups provide, where parents can "get the feel" of proper snugness, is crucial to preventing injuries to children.
5. Based on the few individuals that participated in both the classroom and check-up programs, the class/distribution program appears to be an effective piece of educating parents about car seat use. However, car seat check-ups remain necessary even for these families. Further data collection and analysis will confirm and clarify this conclusion.
6. The vast majority of car seats CCS distributes are purchased by persons with low or modest incomes.
7. CCS has done an excellent job of reaching out to low-income families, especially Latinos. African Americans are under-represented in CCS programs.
8. CCS programs reach the greater Chicago area, with almost half of the total participants residing in the Chicago suburbs.

Because post-tests were not employed, outcomes of the CCS programs cannot be explored. A framework for further evaluation is offered that will permit a more precise testing of the effectiveness of the two major interventions: car seat classroom instruction and car seat check ups.

If you would like a copy of the entire report, please contact us at CHDL.