

Sarah Brooks – Supplementary Written evidence (PRT0062)

Bliss (Charity for babies born prematurely or sick) estimate that in the UK 60,000 babies are born prematurely each year, that is 1 in every 13 babies are born prematurely (1)

Since 2006 it has been law to carry a baby in a car seat. The car seat is the only piece of baby equipment that you legally need to use. Child car seats: the law produced by the Government February 9th 2017, state that children must normally use a car seat until they are 12 years old or 135 centimetres tall, whichever comes first (2). The Law continues by saying you can choose a child car seat based on your child's height or weight. Research tells us with the use of an appropriate fitting car seat the risk of serious injury and death is reduced by 70%.

Within the written paper we are guided by RoSPA on how to choose an appropriate car seat for your child's height and weight.

The problem

- Unadapted car seats are unsuitable for small or premature infants
- Car seats are sold as suitable for 0kg-10kg but in fact the smallest crash test dummy is 3.4kg and so seats are untested below this weight.
- The smallest crash test dummy (Q0) is 48cms long yet car seats are sold as suitable for babies 40cm
- According to the Office of National statistics (ONS) 2018, 43% of term babies in England alone weighed less than 3.5kgs at birth (3).
- Neonatal units are aware of this problem; some carry out the 'car seat challenge' this test is conducted before discharge to determine if the baby can tolerate the seat. The thresholds of pass or fail and the metrics applied are different from unit to unit.

- Upon discharge we offer information around the risk of sudden infant death and safe sleeping guidelines. The position in the car seat is an issue, potentially increasing the risk of positional asphyxia.
- To offer the best service and support Neonatal nurses are modifying seats using blankets, sheet rolls and untested supports.
- Advice/guidance from the law states that you must not add anything to a baby seat that has not been tested with the seat and now advise you to remove your baby/child coat so that the harness fits closer to the body.
- Adaptive inserts are available but frequently do not address the fit of the seat
- Parents often record or photograph this teaching so they can repeat as necessary

RoSPA published a guide 2018 'Carrying premature and low birth weight babies in child car seats'. Within this guide RoSPA recommend 'lie flat' car seats as the only safe product on the market. (4)

- These seats are expensive
- only suitable for up to approximately 8 weeks,
- only one seat can fit in the back of a car and many of the babies born early are multiples
- the harness still does not fit the baby the seat is not tested below the weight 3.4kg/48cm

Work so far

- Local manufacturers unable to provide suitable products and information

- Product demo developed by Outreach team and discussed at manufacturers conference in Nice 2019.
- Contacted local road safety officers
- Information given to Child car seat safety UK
- Telephone discussions with Head of road safety RoSPA
- Task group formed

In February 2020 as part of a 'task group' a meeting was held at RoSPA HQ to discuss how we could find a safe solution for this problem. It was agreed that this needed to be taken forward with the Department for Transport.

At this meeting data was requested on harm to smaller babies in collisions as a result of being in unsuitable car seats. We were unable to gather this data and we were informed that this level of information was not stored.

Internal geometry used by the manufacturers to ensure the child car seat can accommodate children of the specified stature range was looked at. Some of the data was missing from this table resulting in no measurements for baby's 40cm length or less.

In September 2020, RoSPA requested data from the Neonatal Network in relation to measurements of smaller babies. Data was gathered over a three-month period and was submitted to RoSPA in January/February 2021.

- RoSPA met with the DfT April 2021 data was presented to them, no actions taken.
- Connected with Bliss (CEO), BAPM (CEO), Neonatal network leads-wrote a joint letter to the DfT Baroness Vere (DfT) outlining safety issues and requesting support.
- Further connections/meetings with DfT and DHSC.

- Cybex/CELPA member requested the Neonatal measurements data.
- Data analysed-significant correlation between our anecdotal evidence in practice and the measurements of internal geometry.
- Data presented at the 'Protection of Children in Cars Conference' Munich 2022. (5)
- Request made by CLEPA member to amend regulation R129 using the provided information gathered and analysed- not all members agreed.
- Further meetings with DfT-suggest that within the law, the regulation allows for manufactures to make adjustments by using the 'Children with disability or medical conditions' section. This requires a medical certificate from a doctor to issue an exemption.
- Discussed certificate with consultants who would not issue a letter of exemption for this safety equipment.
- In January 2023, a report to prevent future deaths (6) suggested that advice was given to parents on discharge from hospital about the risks of sudden infant death and identifying the greater risk to those who have been born preterm or low birth weight.
- Attempt to contact the Senior Coroner involved in this report.
- Cybex have used the data collected by the National Network to develop an insert for their car seat.
- Cybex have requested the support from the Northern network to carry out a small study looking at the fitting of the baby in the seat
- The data has also been shared with 'Swedish road Transport Administration' whom are working towards developing a 'virtual testing models'.

Recommendations

- The UK require clear best guidelines for Neonatal teams, midwives and health care professionals on how to fit a small baby in their car seat safely
- A solution: an insert/car seat adaptation/ accessory
- Appropriate testing, a crash test dummy that is representative of the weight/length of a pre term/ low birth weight baby.
- Further research into the “car seat challenge” that is used by some Neonatal units as there are no universal guidelines to this process.
- Support and understanding from Government policy on the need for appropriate safety equipment to facilitate small babies in transport

References

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3. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths/bulletins/birthsummarytablesenglandandwales/2018/pdf>
4. <https://www.rospa.com/rospaweb/docs/events/past-events/road-safety-conference-2019/nick-lloyd.pdf>
5. Toby Barwick: Prevention of Future Deaths Report – Courts and Tribunals Judiciary <https://www.judiciary.uk/prevention-of-future-death-reports/toby-barwick-prevention-of-future-deaths-report/>
6. S. Schleuning*, C. Thurn, C. Visvikis, F. Huber-Dangl: Anthropometry of preterm newborns and their fit in child restraint systems https://www.researchgate.net/publication/379908921_Anthropometry_of_preterm_newborns_and_their_fit_in_child_restraint_systems

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