

Leave baby car seats in car, study says

By REUTERS

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To prevent injuries in babies, car seats should stay in the car. That's the message of a new study, published today in the journal *Pediatrics*, which shows that almost 9,000 infants go to the emergency room (ER) every year for car seat-related injuries that happen outside the car.

If the seat does have to come out of the car, said co-author Lindsay Wilson, parents should make sure their babies are always strapped in.

Wilson and Dr. Shital Parikh, both from the orthopedics division of Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, reviewed five years worth of data from a national U.S. surveillance system to find records of babies less than one year old that were taken to the ER for car seat injuries.

From 2003-2007, almost 2,000 babies in the sample - so about 43,500 in the entire U.S., the authors estimated - were brought to the ER for a car seat injury. Most of those injuries happened when babies fell out of their car seat or were in the seat when it fell off a table, counter or shopping cart.

Head or neck injuries were most common, especially in the youngest babies, who were also more likely to go to the ER. About half of the injuries happened at home.

There were only a few car seat-related deaths recorded in the authors' sample, so they weren't able to calculate a national estimate.

Part of the reason these injuries are so common, the authors write, is that parents may assume that babies won't be moving around because they haven't developed good coordination yet. So they commonly leave the baby in a car seat without strapping it in, or set the seat somewhere that puts the child at eye level.

"Often parents don't use the safety harnesses or safety strap in the seat or in the carriage and so the kids ... wiggle and they slide right out," Dr. Gary Smith, director of the Center for Injury Research and Policy at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio, who was not involved in the study, told Reuters Health.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, babies less than a year old go to the ER at a higher rate than any other age group. In 2006, there were 84.5 ER visits for every 100 infants - or about 3.5 million total visits. The most common cause of injury in babies is some sort of fall.

The authors hope the study will help educate parents on safe car seat use. For a lot of parents, Wilson said, "it's just easier to leave the kid in the car seat, set them on the countertop, and go on with what you need to do."

But if possible, Smith said, babies should instead be moved to a crib, play pen, or carrier. "Child safety seats were intended for use in motor vehicles to prevent injury in the event of a crash," he said. "That's their purpose and that's what they should be used for."