

# 'Learn lesson': use restraints

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*The Gazette*

With the number of school car pools growing, car-safety experts are urging parents to learn fast from the grisly minivan accident that killed seven children Thursday in Saint-Jean-Baptiste-de-Nicolet.

Minivans are not the problem. Drivers, and how they restrain young passengers, are, said Debbie Friedman, head of the Montreal Children's Hospital neurotrauma program.

"We're noticing that with car pools parents take more children than there are seatbelts," she said. "Some parents also put two children in one seatbelt. In the past couple of years, we're seeing more of these cases."

Friedman's advice for parents seems painfully obvious. Children under 12 must sit in the back seat and passengers must wear seatbelts. Those under 5 must sit in a child seat.

Transport Canada says the proper use of child restraints across the country has increased from 40.8 per cent in 1989 to 67.7 per cent in 1997.

## CHILD SEATS NOT INSTALLED CORRECTLY

But Quebec's automobile-insurance board, the Société de l'Assurance Automobile, says most Quebec parents do not use restraints correctly.

Only 80 per cent of parents whose children need child seats use them, and about 60 per cent of child seats are installed incorrectly.

Kelly Grover of Safe Kids Canada, a national non-profit accident-prevention program, says 200 children are killed annually in car accidents across the country and another 20,000 child passengers are injured.

"With more parents car-pooling and more kids in daycare, it is up to the parents to take the time to make sure their children's caregiver properly restrains their child in a car," Grover said.

On Thursday, a daycare-centre owner drove with 10 children in a van built for seven passengers. Many of the children, most under 5, were thrown from the van in a collision.

At the Montreal Children's Hospital, Friedman said, half of all head injuries result from car accidents and doctors say many of those injuries are preventable.

"You don't need 10 of these accidents to happen for people to learn a lesson," she said. "One death is too many."

Parents with child-seat installation questions can call the Quebec chapter of the Canadian Automobile Association at (514) 861-7111 or their local CLSC. For car-safety information, call Safe Kids Canada at (888) 723-3847 or visit their Web site at [www.safekidsCanada.ca](http://www.safekidsCanada.ca)