

Minimum Height Restrictions

Why must my child be this tall to ride?

The amusement ride industry uses minimum height limits as a way of restricting the size of riders allowed on board. In some cases, the restriction is tied to the physical size of the rider (i.e., the ride's restraint system is only designed to ensure safe containment for larger bodies). In some cases, the restriction is tied to the rider's age (i.e., the designer or operator may feel that younger children are too immature to handle the physical or emotional stresses imposed by the ride).

Is the ride safe for all children who meet the height limit?

Not necessarily. Height is used to screen riders because the ride operator easily measures it, but it's only a rough approximation for age or maturity. According to current growth charts, 7-year-olds can range in height from 44 inches to 52 inches (5th-95th percentile). If a manufacturer intends a ride for the 7-and-older crowd, where should the minimum height limit be set?

- A height limit of 52 inches would screen out almost all riders younger than seven, but it would also screen out a portion of riders up to 11 years of age, seriously limiting the ride's marketability.
- Some manufacturers will set the restriction using 50th percentile height for that age. In this case, 48" is the median height of a 7-yo. That would allow some 5- and 6-year-olds to ride.
- Less risk-averse manufacturers may use the 95th percentile height (44" for a 7-yo). A 44" minimum height limit means almost all 7-yos would have an opportunity to buy tickets for this ride, but it also means that children as young as 4 could board a machine intended for kids 7-and-up.

All three of the strategies described above are allowed under current codes and standards. There are no requirements that restraints fit smaller riders or that parents be warned about conflicts between allowed use and intended use.

If you have a child who just barely over the minimum height limit for a ride, take a sober look at the ride experience before deciding whether it's really a safe choice. Make sure the restraints fit securely on smaller bodies before putting the small body of your beloved child on the ride.

My kid is almost tall enough to ride. What's the harm in stuffing a few napkins in his shoes?

Minimum height limits for many amusement rides are already dangerously low. Accident reports from state safety agencies show that children who barely meet the height limit are at significantly higher risk for falls and ejections from moving rides.

Parents who fudge the minimum height limits even further, by sneaking their kids past the measure, putting their child in platform shoes, or bullying the operator into letting their shorter child board a ride, may be exposing their child to serious danger. You don't want to live with the consequences of a bad accident -- especially when it's your own fault and your own child who suffers.

My 2-year old is tall enough for kiddie rides, but I'm not allowed to ride with her. Should I let her ride alone?

Kiddie rides are designed specifically for young children to ride without adults. Most 5-year-olds are mature enough to handle kiddie rides, but market pressure has brought height limits down so low on some of these machines that children who can't yet talk and have barely learned to walk are allowed to ride -- and their parents are prohibited from riding along because they're too big for the machinery. This sets up a risky situation. Toddlers and preschoolers are creatures of impulse. They're genetically wired to run to mom or dad when they get bored or tired or suddenly realize the friendly bumblebee they climbed into is taking them high off the ground and far away from their parents.

Accident data from state safety agencies shows that preschooler falls are a serious problem. Although kiddie rides account for only 8% of all reported amusement ride accidents, they account for 33% of accidents involving falls from the carrier. These accidents peak for 2-year-olds. More than half of the victims are 3-years-old or younger.

Kiddie rides are generally slow moving, but falls can still be dangerous to children because of exposure to heights and machinery hazards. Almost one quarter of the accident reports filed with safety agencies state that the child was hit by, run over by, or dragged by the ride after falling out.

Every child is different and every ride is different. Millions of children use kiddie rides without incident each year, but there aren't many layers of protection if your child decides to disembark mid-ride. It helps to look for fitted restraints with child-resistant closures. If your preschooler is overly adventurous, easily frightened or going through a clingy phase, don't let her ride alone, even on a "kiddie" ride. It's not worth the risk. Don't put your child on an amusement ride just because a height limit sign says she's tall enough.

Info courtesy of www.saferparks.org

If you still have questions, ask for a ride supervisor

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