

Riding Safe – Ensuring Safe Use of Car Seats and Bicycle Helmets

Issue

Automobile accidents and bicycle mishaps are among the leading causes of injury and death for children. Well documented research shows that these injuries, and the health care costs that result, can be significantly reduced by properly installing car seats and by using properly fitted bike helmets.

In Whatcom County, Washington, the health department recognized the impact that a safety program promoting car seats and bike helmets could have. Many families in the county were already calling the health department for instructions on installing their car seats and for information on choosing the right helmet for their child. So it was a natural fit to spend 2007 Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant funds on a safety and education program.

Intervention

The Whatcom County Health Department implemented these strategies in 2007:

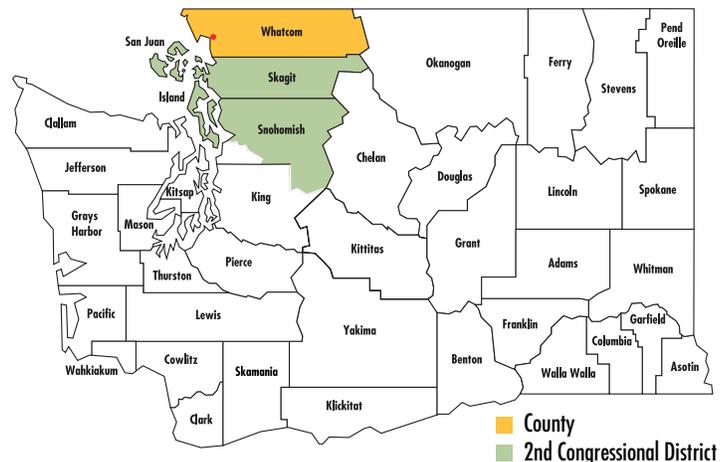
- **Hosted community events** to educate parents and families on properly installing car seats
- **Hosted monthly classes** for the public, taught by a certified car seat technician
- **Trained or recertified eight car seat technicians**
- **Reinforced community partnerships** with Bellingham Police, Whatcom County Sheriff, Mother Baby Center, and St. Joseph Hospital
- **Held events at local schools** to show parents how to properly fit bike helmets on their children
- **Distributed car seats and bike helmets to low income families**

Impact

Measurable impact achieved in 2007 included:

- **30 car seats were inspected at a community event**—90 percent of them were found to have problems which were fixed by car seat technicians
- **18 monthly classes were held** on car seat safety, educating 118 people on how to safely install and operate a car seat
- **69 car seats were distributed** to low income families

The Whatcom County Health Department plans to continue efforts, started through block grant funding, to reduce and eventually eliminate child deaths and injuries from motor vehicle and bicycle accidents.



County population*: 188,300

Whatcom County Health Department
Bellingham, Washington
<http://www.whatcomcounty.us/health/index.jsp>