Holiday 2020: Top Safety Tips for Vehicle Travel During Pandemic

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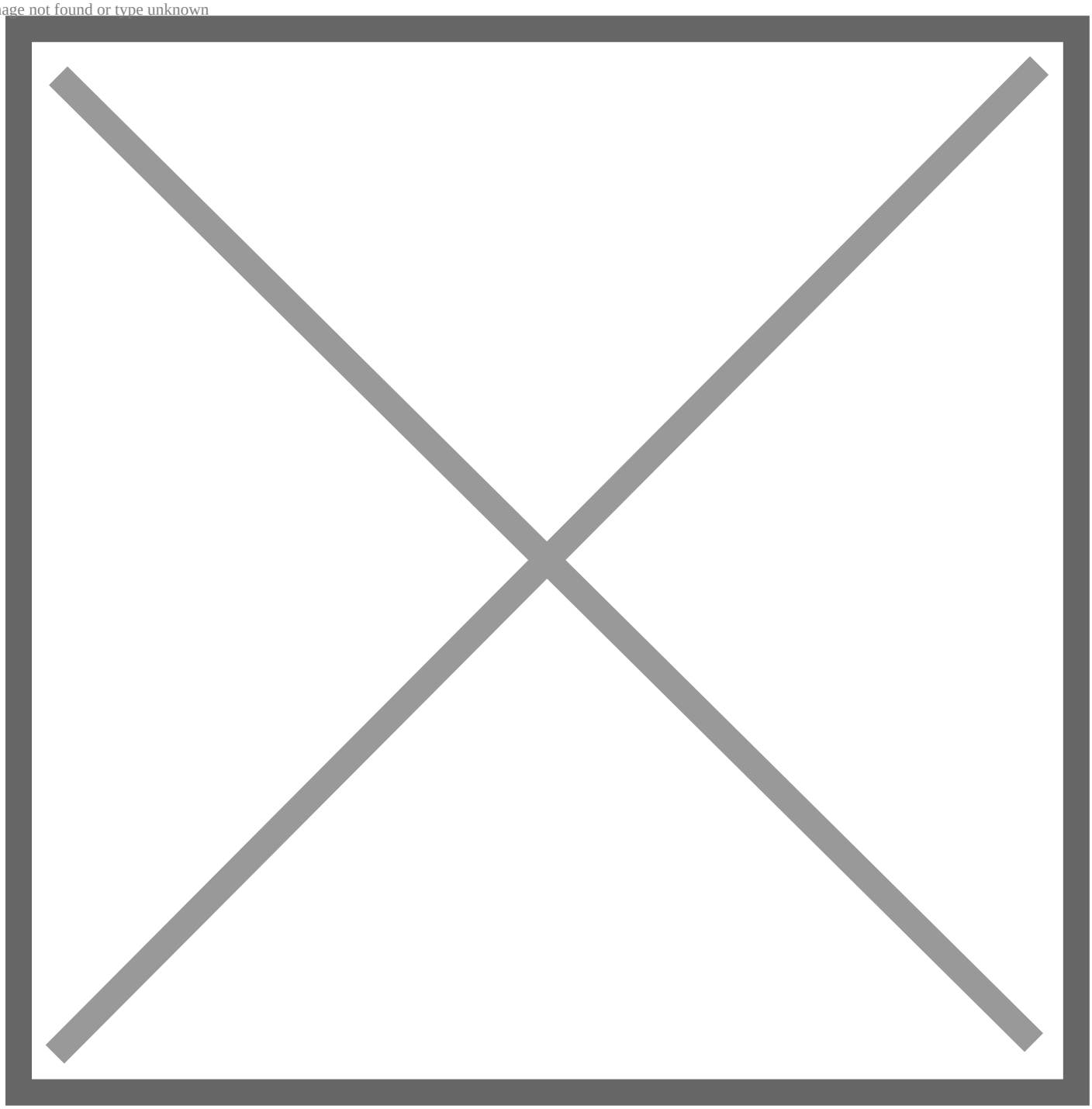

In a year full of unknowns and uncertainties, what's normally the busiest travel season of the year will certainly slow down. People will decide what makes most sense for them when it comes to family gatherings and trips. For those who choose to travel this holiday season, their family's health and safety is a top priority, more so than ever.

Celebrating the holidays virtually to avoid large gatherings would be the safest option, but those who are planning to see family members should plan to quarantine ahead of time to decrease the risk of exposure. That said, many see traveling by car as a way to have more control over potential exposure to COVID-19. In fact, a recent survey conducted on behalf of Toyota shows more than half of Americans see their vehicle as a "safe haven" from the coronavirus.

Despite the pandemic, the survey also found:

- 42% of U.S. adults are likely to go on vacation or travel by year-end
- 56% said they were less likely to venture outside their home state
- 72% said they would take a vehicle versus flying

"Safety is one of our top priorities, but it reaches well beyond making our Toyota vehicles among the safest on the road," says Mike Goss, general manager, social innovation. "Our mission extends to making the roads safer for everyone who travels by car. Starting with the safety of infants and children, to teens behind the wheel, and graduating up to safe driving for seniors — it is an all-encompassing safety commitment."

Regarding infants, a startling 75% of child safety seats are not used correctly. Beyond installing the seat in the car, do you know which way your child should face? The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends children remain in rear-facing seats until age 2, or until they exceed the height and weight limit for the seat. And don't forget to remove your child's winter coat before you buckle them into their car seat. Puffy coats and excess clothing can prevent straps from tightening enough to properly restrain your child if an accident occurs.

Buckle Up for Life, a national child passenger safety program created by Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center and Toyota, teaches parents how to help keep their children safe. Here are the top safety tips provided by Buckle Up for Life and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for traveling during the pandemic:

1. **Vehicle safety checks.** Before departing, have a service shop check your vehicle's tire pressure, battery, fuel filter, radiator coolant and brake fluid. Also top off your windshield-washer fluid.
2. **Plan your route.** When considering your destination, the CDC suggests asking yourself the following questions:
    - Is COVID-19 spreading in the community or the area you are visiting? If so, you may have a higher chance of becoming infected or infecting others.
    - Will you be able to maintain a distance of 6 feet between yourself and others during travel and at your destination?
    - Does the destination require visitors to quarantine themselves upon arrival?
3. **Plan out and reduce stops for food, gas and bathroom breaks.** Pack a cooler with food and drinks to limit your time and interactions with other people. Need to make a bottle for baby? Take a thermos of hot water so you can mix it in the car. Make sure you've packed hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, sanitizing wipes and disposable gloves for pumping gas.
4. **Follow CDC safety precautions when you go inside a gas station or restaurant.** Wear a mask. Avoid close contact by staying at least 6 feet from anyone who is not from your household. Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth, and avoid contact with anyone who is sick. Be aware of frequently touched surfaces, such as doors, gas pumps and bathrooms.

5. **Secure holiday "extras" in the car.** Make sure all gifts, luggage and other holiday items are tightly secured. These objects could become projectiles in the event of a crash. If you are traveling with pets, make sure they are properly restrained as well.
6. **Stay alert!** Driving while drowsy results in a four- to six-times higher near-crash/crash risk.[1] Toyota safety features such as pre-collision detection, dynamic radar cruise control, auto high beams and blind spot monitoring help look out for your safety, but you still need to stay alert and focused on the road.
7. **Take breaks.** Long trips can be tough on you and your children. Be sure to pack entertainment for the kids, such as videos, books and games. If you're traveling with other adults, take turns driving, and don't forget to take breaks if you're driving a long distance.
8. **Use the "inch and pinch" test.** After you've buckled your child in, pinch the car seat strap near their shoulders. If you can pinch a wrinkle in the fabric, tighten the strap until it is snug. Then grab the car seat at the bottom where it is attached to the car and tug from side to side and front to back. If the seat moves more than an inch in any direction, tighten it.

"The holidays are a time in which we focus on our loved ones — and for many that means hopping in the car with small children for a visit," says Gloria Del Castillo, senior specialist of community engagement, Buckle Up for Life. "While the 2020 holiday season may look different than normal, we still need to ensure our most precious cargo — our children — are safely buckled in."

Over the past 15 years, Buckle Up for Life and Toyota have donated 70,000 car seats to families in need by partnering with local organizations around the country. Parents are educated one on one or can access information online.

For more resources, including animated car seat installation videos, go to buckleupforlife.org.

Before you hit the road, check the CDC website for the latest COVID-19 guidelines for travel during the pandemic. And, remember, stay home if you're sick.

[1]The Impact of Driver Inattention on Near-Crash/Crash Risk: An Analysis Using the 100-Car Naturalistic Driving Study Data, April 2006, http://www.nhtsa.gov/DOT/NHTSA/NRD/Multimedia/PDFs/Crash%20Avoidance/Driver%20Distraction/810594.pdf