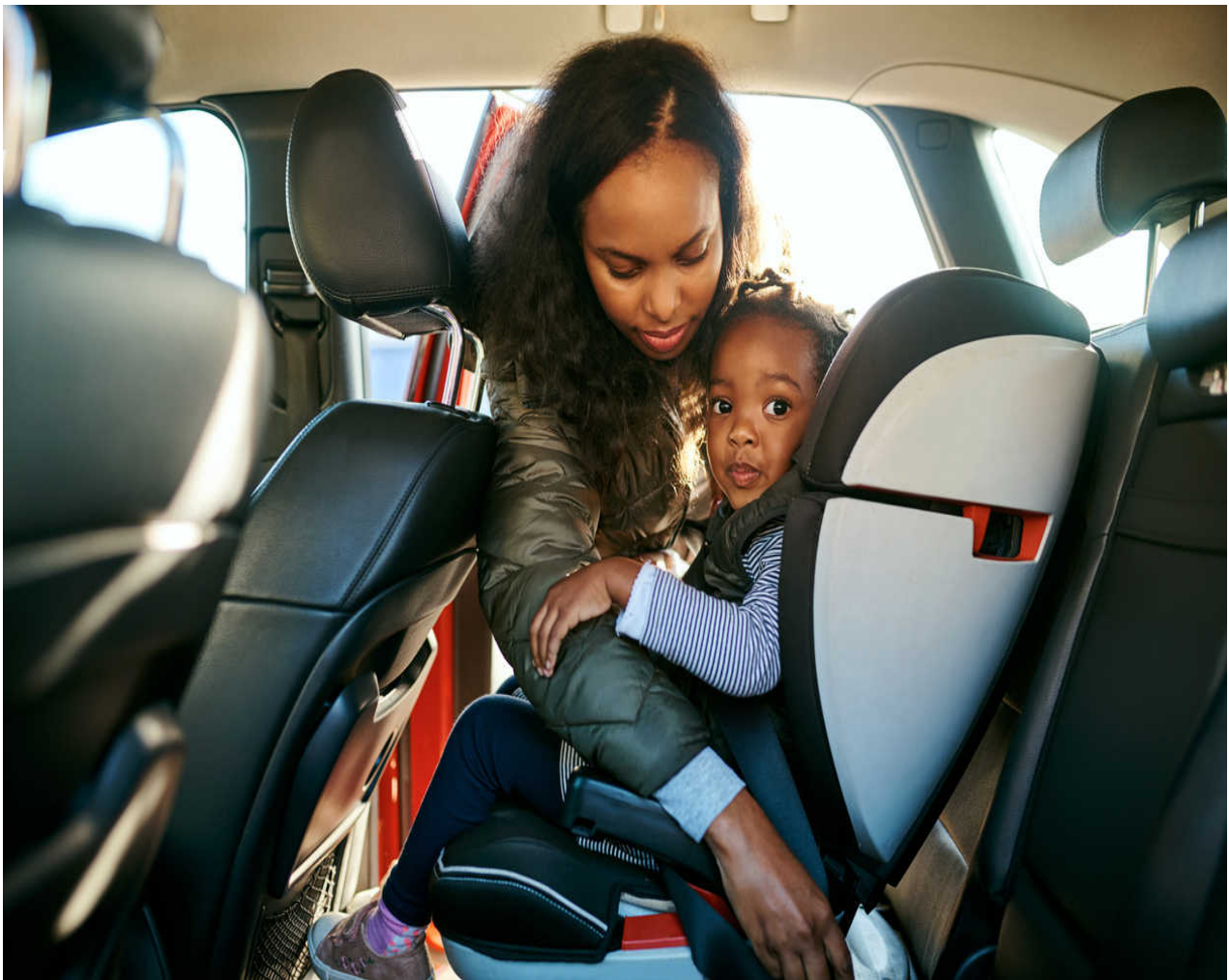


The Virgin Islands Consortium

Overwhelming Number of Motorists Still Not Using Child Safety Seats Correctly, Says VIPD; Local Pediatrician Donates to Cause

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Child passenger safety continues to be a major concern for the Virgin Islands Police Department, as statistics released this week show ongoing difficulty with either compliance or correct use of seats.

The VIPD this week released statistics from a territory-wide child safety seat check operation on February 11, conducted in partnership with the Virgin Islands Office of Highway Safety (VIOHS). According to the data, 80 percent of the seats checked on St. Thomas were not being used correctly, a number that rose to 89 percent on St. Croix. On

the mainland, error rates average 46%, according to information from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).

“Even the best safety seat on the market will not keep your child safe if it is not used correctly,” said Daphne O’Neal, VIOHS director.

Certified Child Passenger Safety Technicians (CPSTs), who were deployed along with traffic officers on the pre-Valentine’s seat check day, are available year-round to help people choose the best seat for their child, and to teach caregivers how to install the seats correctly. “It would behoove caregivers to take full advantage of this no-cost lifesaving service,” Ms. O’Neal urged.

On that day, traffic officers stopped motorists who were transporting children unsafely to hand out not only education on child safety laws but also citations, to encourage compliance. “Our officers will continue to conduct enforcement activities to support parents in doing right by the children in their care,” declared VIPD Commissioner Ray Martinez.

Meanwhile, Dr. Anthony Ricketts of Pediatric Care Centre has stepped up to address the issue of child safety in vehicles by donating 20 booster seats to the VIOHS Booster Seat Drive. The drive is meant to provide seats to parents of children ages 4 to 7 who are not being appropriately secured in vehicles. The VIPD says more than 7 in every 10 children in that age group are “leaving elementary school campuses illegally and unsafely,” and the VIOHS initiative is intended to reduce that alarming statistic.

The VIPD reminds the public that children under the age of 14 are required by law to be safely secured in the back seat of a vehicle. Children below the age of 8 must sit in an appropriate car or booster seat.