

It Can Happen to Anyone!

In today's busy world it is easy to rush from one place to another and hurry out of a vehicle. It is likely that everyone has forgotten something in a hot vehicle before – food that spoiled, lipstick that melted, or a cellphone that overheated.

There is a much greater danger than leaving behind shopping bags or groceries when frantically exiting a vehicle – a child could be left inside the car, where heat quickly climbs to deadly temperatures, even in the mildest climates. The idea that someone could forget a child seems unbelievable to most people, but it can happen to even the most attentive parents.

So many parents say, "I would never forget my child." But each year about 37-53 children die from hyperthermia (heatstroke) because they are left inside of a car. Stress, exhaustion, and distraction can lead anyone to make dangerous mistakes.

Even if you are of the opinion that this could never happen to your family, you should still take precautions to prevent children from being left behind in a vehicle. What if you came across a child or pet left in a vehicle with climbing temperatures? You would probably call 9-1-1. But time is of the essence, so be sure you are ready to do what is necessary to protect the child from heatstroke. Your actions could save a life!



RESOURCES

Ready.gov:

www.ready.gov/heat

Safe Kids:

www.safekids.org

Safer Car:

www.safercar.gov

PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM HOT CAR DEATHS



Vehicular heatstroke for children and pets usually occurs because the caregiver thought they would be just a few minutes, but temperatures in a car can rise quicker than you may realize.

On sunny days when the average temperature is around 88° F, temperatures inside a closed vehicle can be over 134° F in less than 1 hour.



What Is Heatstroke?

Heatstroke occurs when the body's core temperature reaches 104° F. Body temperatures can rise to 106°F or higher within 10-15 minutes, resulting in permanent injury, brain damage, and even death. Fatalities occur at 107° F.

Outside temperatures do not have to be high in order for heatstroke to occur. Heatstroke happens because the body is overheated, not because the temperatures outside are high.

Children's body temperatures absorb more heat than adult bodies, so they are more susceptible to the risk of heatstroke. Children need more hydration and better air circulation to stay cool.

Preventing Vehicular Heatstroke

Some steps you can take to prevent children from becoming a victim to this danger are:

- Emphasize to children that the vehicle is not a play area. It is very dangerous to play inside of a vehicle, even if it is not running.

- Keep your vehicle locked when it is parked, and the keys away from the reach of children.
- Place a stuffed animal on the front seat to remind you that you are not alone in the vehicle.
- Place a purse, briefcase, cell phone, or other item you will have to take out of the car in the backseat to be sure you check the area.
- Make a habit of opening the back doors of the vehicle every time you exit it.
- Have a plan with your childcare provider to call you if you have not dropped off your child by a certain time. A common occurrence is when a parent forgets to drop their child off at daycare and instead drives unknowingly to their destination with the child still in the backseat.
- High temperatures affect animals too! Be mindful of pets left in the car.

A Child May Be In Danger

If you think a child may be trapped in a car, you must act quickly and decisively. Time is critical, since a car can heat up very quickly.

- If a child is missing at home, ALWAYS check the pool area first, then all vehicles including trunk spaces.



NO EXCUSES!

Many people try to rationalize reasons why they leave a child in a car, but when it comes to the safety of a child there are no excuses!

"I will only be a few minutes."

In 80° F, it takes less than 10 minutes for a vehicle to heat up to dangerous levels.

"I left the car in the shade."

Heatstroke fatalities have occurred from cars parked in the shade.

"It isn't that warm outside."

Heatstroke in cars has occurred when outside temperatures were as low as 57° F.

"I would never forget my child."

Neurologists have linked stress and memory in studies. When stressed, the brain tends to forget simple tasks.

"I cracked the windows."

Cracked windows provide very little air circulation and do not provide enough cool air to counter rapidly-increasing temperatures.

- If you see a child locked in a vehicle, even if you think the temperature is not too hot, attempt to remove the child from the vehicle.
- Call 9-1-1. Even if you are able to remove the child from the car, chances are they will need medical attention.
- If it becomes necessary to break a window to enter the vehicle, choose the window furthest from the child.

When A Child Is Overheated

After removing the child from the vehicle, take these steps until emergency help can arrive:

- Seek shade in a cool place.
- Apply cool water to the body, or immerse the child in cool water. NEVER apply ice-cold water to the child. The body will react by shivering and raise the temperature higher.

- If the child is able, have them drink cool water, but not too quickly.
- Do not use fever-reducing medications. They will not be effective in this situation.

Stay Safe This Summer!

A hot car is no place for a child to be left alone, even for a few minutes. Make a pledge to yourself this summer and all year long:

Don't Forget! Prevent Vehicular Heatstroke

