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Preventing Hyperthermia in Vehicles

Leaving children alone in vehicles poses many dangers. One such danger is hyperthermia. Hyperthermia, or overheating of the body, occurs more quickly in children than in adults as a child's body cannot control temperature as well and can warm up three to five times faster than an adult's. Heatstroke can occur when the body's core temperature reaches 104 degrees F, which can lead to permanent injury, and a core body temperature of 107 degrees F is usually fatal. An average of 37 children die each year from hyperthermia after being left alone or climbing into unattended vehicles.



Studies conducted by San Francisco State University have found that even when temperatures are relatively cool— around 70 degrees—the inside of a vehicle can quickly reach dangerous temperatures. In fact, within 10 minutes, the inside temperature of a vehicle will be almost 20 degrees hotter than the outside temperature, and after 30 minutes the vehicle's temperature will be 34 degrees hotter.

The following tips are offered to help keep your children safe and avoid heat-related issues.

Teach children that it is never okay to play in vehicles. Make sure that they understand that trunks are only used to transport cargo and are not safe places to play.

- Always lock the doors and trunk to vehicles, especially at home, and keep keys and remote entry devices out of children's reach.
- Never leave a child unattended in a vehicle, even with the windows slightly open.
- Check to ensure that all children leave the vehicle when you do,
- Place something you'll need where you're going — your cellphone, purse, briefcase, etc.—on the floor of the backseat where your child is sitting. This will help avoid forgetting a child, especially a sleeping infant or toddler. This may be especially helpful if there is a change in a normal routine, such as dad dropping off child at childcare when mom usually does this.

[Preventing Hyperthermia in Vehicles]

- Keep a stuffed animal in the child's car seat. When the child is put in the car seat, put the stuffed animal in the front passenger seat as a visual reminder.
- Always open the back door to check the back seat before leaving your vehicle.
- Set your cell phone or Blackberry reminder to be sure you dropped your child off at day care.
- Set your computer outlook program to ask, "Did you drop off at daycare today?"
- Have a plan that if your child is late for daycare that you will be called within a few minutes. Be especially careful if you change your routine for dropping off children at day care.
- If a child is missing, check the vehicle immediately.
- If you see a child alone in a vehicle, call 911 immediately. If the child seems hot or sick, get them out of the vehicle as quickly as possible.



Nineteen states currently have laws that make it illegal to leave a child unattended in a vehicle, and 15 have proposed legislation that would make it a crime to leave a child alone in a car, van, truck or SUV. In Florida, the law states that "No parent, legal guardian or other person responsible for a child younger than 6 years of age shall leave such child unattended or unsupervised in a motor vehicle for a period in excess of 15 minutes; however, no such person shall leave a child unattended for any period of time if the motor vehicle is running or the health of the child is in danger."

The best practice to keep your child safe is to never leave your child unattended in a motor vehicle. Not for a minute... not for a second.

For more information on preventing injury and deaths in vehicles, go to:

<http://www.kidsandcars.org>

<http://www.safekids.org/nlyca>

References

In and Around Vehicle Safety Fact Sheet. Safe Kids USA

Children In and Around Cars: What you need to know to keep kids safe around vehicles. Safe Kids Worldwide

Safety Tips from KidsAndCars.org. <http://www.kidsandcars.org/files/2015/06/Heat-Stroke-Safety-Tips.pdf>