

Hot Cars, Children, and Hyperthermia

Tragically in July 2009, three heat-related deaths occurred due to child care facilities leaving children in hot vans. According to Safe Kids Worldwide, an average of 25 children die each year in America as the result of being left in a car on a warm day. Every child care program should take immediate steps to review their policies and reinforce the need for drivers to inspect vehicles thoroughly before leaving the car or van.

The temperature inside a vehicle can quickly reach fatal levels for young children, even with outside temperatures as low as 60°F. A car's internal temperature can heat up 40 or more degrees in a matter of minutes. In one test conducted on a 93-degree day, the car's internal temperature reached 125°F in about 20 minutes. Leaving a window cracked has little effect on a vehicle's internal conditions.

Children are more vulnerable to heat because their body temperatures increase three to five times faster than an adult's. Heat stroke can occur when the body core temperature reaches 104°F, and a body core temperature of 107°F is considered lethal.

Take the following measures to prevent leaving a child in a hot or unattended vehicle:

- Conspicuously post notices reminding drivers never to leave children alone in vehicles. Display reminders on information boards, doors, and vehicle dashboards. Not only can this help prevent a heat-related tragedy, it reduces the opportunity for someone to abduct a child who is alone in a car.
- For each trip, create a checklist of passengers and verify that each child is on-board before you leave and unloaded when you arrive.
- Always double-check your vehicle after unloading. Do not depend on technology, such as motion alarms and secondary alert systems.
- Small infants can be overlooked easily if they are asleep in a large safety seat.
- Always lock vehicles so children cannot get into a car unsupervised.
- Never leave keys where children can get them.
- If a child is locked inside a car, get the child out as quickly as possible. If the child is hot or seems sick, call 911 immediately and follow your protocol for contacting parents in an emergency.
- When a child is missing, check vehicles and trunks right away.
- Check the temperature of the child safety seat's surface and belt buckles before restraining a child. When hot, these surfaces can burn a child.
- Make sure your staff training program includes information about children's safety in and around vehicles.

Many states have passed laws that make it illegal to leave a child unattended in a vehicle.

To find out more about hyperthermia deaths of children in vehicles, along with resources you can use to train staff and help prevent this tragedy, visit <http://ggweather.com/heat/#safety> and <http://kidsandcars.org/>.