

Children First: Safe and Secure



Section IV—Issues Challenging Families

Heat and Cars: Look Before You Leave

During the summer of 2003, 10 Texas children, most of them infants, died after being left in vehicles in which they had been riding. In fact, the Lone Star State led the nation for the number of such fatalities. None of these tragic events would have occurred had each child's adult caregiver remembered to remove them from their vehicles once they arrived at their destination.

It's hard to imagine having to warn parents or caregivers about leaving children alone in cars, especially during the heat of the summer. But many caring and responsible people can forget the silent or sleeping child in the backseat. Others do not realize the risks involved in leaving their children in the car and what begins as a quick errand can turn to tragedy in a matter of minutes.

If children are trapped inside cars, especially during seriously hot weather, it can result in heat exhaustion or heat stroke, leading to permanent disability or death. Heat stroke, also known as hyperthermia, can cause shock, seizures, irregular heartbeat, heart attack, and damage to the brain, liver, and kidneys.

Statistics

How Long Does It Take For A Car to Get Hot?*

Outside Temperature	Temperature In Car	Time it Takes to Reach
75	100	10 minutes
75	120	30 minutes
85	90	5 minutes
85	100	7-10 minutes
85	120	30 minutes
100	140	15 minutes

* Compiled by TDFPS from various national sources

How To Prevent Tragedy

- ◆ Never leave your car keys where children can get them.
- ◆ Keep car doors and trunks locked at all times, even in the garage or driveway.
- ◆ Teach children not to play in or around cars.
- ◆ Never leave your child unattended in a car, even if the windows are down and a windshield shade is in place or even just to run a quick errand.
- ◆ Make sure all children leave the vehicle when you reach your destination.
- ◆ Don't overlook sleeping infants!
- ◆ Make sure that the seat belt and seat surface are not too hot before buckling up your child.
- ◆ When you and your children exit the car, place a windshield shade in front and back windows to help cut down on the heat.
- ◆ Make sure that kids' arms, legs, fingers, and toes are safely inside before closing doors.
- ◆ Keep the rear fold-down seats closed to prevent kids from getting into the trunk from inside the car.
- ◆ Contact your auto dealership about getting your vehicle retrofitted with a trunk release mechanism.
- ◆ Be wary of child-resistant locks--make sure they function.
- ◆ If your child does get locked inside a car, get him or her out as soon as possible. If you can't get him or her out yourself, call 911 or your local emergency number immediately.

Information adapted from Kids In Cars (www.kidsincars.org) and National Safe Kids Campaign (www.safekids.org)