

Never leave a child in a vehicle - not even for a moment!

With COVID-19 still a threat, parents may be tempted to leave a child in the vehicle while they run into the store. Leaving a child in a vehicle, which can quickly heat up, is always a dangerous idea - even if it is for a very short time.

Children are more at risk for heatstroke since a child's body temperature rises 3 to 5 times faster than an adult. Heatstroke can occur at body temperatures above 104 degrees. Even mild outside temperatures can pose a threat, but with Texas temperatures soon climbing into the upper 90s each day, the danger becomes even greater. The problem is that temperatures in parked vehicles rise very quickly. According to figures from San Francisco State University's Department of Geosciences, in just 10 minutes, the temperature inside of a vehicle can increase by almost 20 degrees.

There have already been two heatstroke deaths in the U.S. during 2020, with one unfortunately occurring in Texas. More unfortunately, Texas leads the nation in children dying in hot cars, with these deaths happening to families of all socioeconomic levels. Of the children that die in hot cars, more than 50 percent of them are "forgotten" in the car by a parent or caregiver. Leaving a child to die in a hot vehicle is something most parents think will never happen to them. It is important that every parent take steps to make sure it does not happen to them!

Parents need to take steps to prevent these needless and tragic deaths. To reduce deaths from heatstroke, Safe Kids USA has launched a campaign titled ACT, which stands for: Avoid Heatstroke-related Injury, Create Reminders, and Take Action. The campaign is designed to link together these simple heatstroke prevention steps.

It is important that parents and caregivers are on alert to avoid a heatstroke death, and that they share the ACT campaign steps with spouses, grandparents, babysitters and other caregivers. Any change in schedule for drop-off or pickup of a child can lead to a deadly mistake. Such deaths are preventable

when parents take precautions to make sure that children are not left alone in vehicles and cannot gain access to unlocked vehicles.

When parents and caregivers think of children being left alone in cars, their first thought is the danger of children dying in hot cars due to heatstroke. But in addition to heat risks, there are other safety concerns with unsupervised children around cars - including back-overs, the risk of children releasing the gear shift or engaging electric windows, and even becoming trapped inside vehicles or trunks. According to Safe Kids Worldwide, approximately 39 percent of back-over deaths occurred at home. Drivers in back-over and front-over deaths are often family members or family friends of the child.

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service-Rusk reminds parents to be extra vigilant ensuring that children are never left alone in or around parked vehicles. Follow these safety tips in this article to be sure that children cannot be harmed in a vehicle.

Children left in Hot Vehicles

-Never leave infants or children in a parked vehicle, even if the windows are partially open.

-Make a habit of looking in the vehicle - front and back - before locking the door and walking away.

-Carefully check all seats in the van or bus to make sure there are no children sleeping on the seats or hiding under seats.

-Do not let children play in an unattended vehicle. Teach them that a vehicle is not a play area.

-Check with the family when a child does not show up for day care to be sure a parent has not forgotten a child in their vehicle.

-Always lock vehicle doors and trunks - and keep keys out of children's reach.



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-If a child is missing, check the vehicle first, including the trunk or storage area.

-If a child is in distress due to heat, get them out as quickly as possible. Cool the child rapidly, then call 911 or the local emergency number immediately.

Children around Parked Vehicles

-Walk all the way around the parked vehicle to check for children, pets, or toys before getting in the car and starting the engine.

-Make sure young children are always accompanied by an adult when getting in and out of a car.

-Identify and use safe play areas for children away from parked or moving vehicles.

-Designate a safe spot for children to go when nearby vehicles are about to move.

-Firmly hold the hand of each child when walking near moving vehicles and when in driveways, parking lots, or sidewalks.

-Teach children not to play in and around vehicles.

Children left in Running Vehicles

-Lock vehicles always - even in the garage or driveway.

-Never leave keys in the car.

-Store keys out of children's reach.

-Engage the vehicle's emergency brake every time after setting the vehicle in park.

-Check to see if the vehicle has a Brake Transmission Safety Interlock (BTSI), which is a safety technology to prevent children from accidentally putting a vehicle into gear. Also, check the vehicle owner's manual to see if the vehicle is equipped with BTSI. After Sept. 1, 2010, all vehicles with an automatic transmission with a PARK position must have BTSI.

-Use drive-thru services when available.

-Use a debit or credit card to pay for gas at the pump.

-Lock the power windows so that children cannot play with and cannot get caught in them.

-Power windows can strangle a child or cut off a finger.

Following these safety tips can make all the difference in avoiding a needless tragedy.