

Hot cars: A deadly danger that can happen to anyone

Tips for preventing hot-weather tragedies

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On average, 37 children die of heat stroke each year after being left in a hot car, according to KidsAndCars.org. While it may be hard to imagine, many deaths have occurred when over-stressed parents forgot that their children were in the backseat.

These hot-car tragedies often occur when there is a change in driver's routine, stress, or a sleeping baby in the back and a parent or caregiver forgets that a child is in the car. Some knowingly leave children "just for a minute" not realizing how quickly the temperature in a car can rise to dangerous levels. Even if it is only 70 degrees outside, a car can quickly heat to more than 120 degrees.

Jennifer Stockburger, Consumer Reports' Director of Operations at our Auto Test Center, says that researchers are working on devices such as weight sensors or heartbeat monitors to detect the presence of a child in the backseat, but nothing currently exists to warn the driver that a child has been left behind.

Here are some tips to help avert a heartbreaking catastrophe and make sure no child is left behind in a vehicle.

- Simple rule: Never leave a child unattended in a vehicle, not even for a minute. In addition to being dangerous, it is against the law in many states.
- Set up cell-phone reminders for yourself to be sure you've gotten the children safely to their destination.
- Check the car to make sure that all occupants leave the vehicle or are carried out when unloading. If you lock the door with a key, rather than with a remote, it would force that one last look in the car before leaving it.
- Always lock your car and keep keys and remotes away from children.
- To serve as a reminder, keep a stuffed animal on the front passenger seat when carrying a child in the backseat.
- Place something in the backseat that you would need, such as a purse, briefcase or cell phone.
- Have a plan that your childcare provider will call you if your child does not show up.
- If you see a child alone in a car, especially if they seem hot, call 911 immediately to help get them out.

<http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/news/2012/12/hot-cars-a-deadly-danger/index.htm>