

## Cars, Kids and Heat: Beware this Deadly Combination



In a matter of minutes, something unspeakable and unthinkable can happen in a place where you and your children spend a lot of time. On average, it occurs about once every 10 days, according to research. Yet no parent thinks it will ever happen to them.

Got your attention? Good. Because every parent should realize the danger of kids being left alone in a car, especially in warm weather. According to KidsAndCars.org, more than 500 children have died in vehicles from heat stroke since 1998, including 49 such fatalities in 2010—the most ever reported in a single year.

But here's the most shocking statistic: In more than half of the incidents, the children were unknowingly forgotten by the driver and left alone in the car, reports KidsAndCars.org.

You're probably thinking, "That's horrible, but I would never do something like that." You're probably right, but have you ever had days when you're so stressed and exhausted that you just space out? Remember, an incident can happen in the time it takes you to drink a latte at your favorite coffee shop.

A child alone in a car on a warm day is a tragedy waiting to happen. The good news is that, with the right precautions, it can be prevented. Here are some things you should know about children's heat stroke risks in cars and what you can do to prevent accidents.

### ***Heat Stroke, Children and Cars***

- Heat stroke (also known as hyperthermia) is a life-threatening condition that occurs when your body temperature reaches 104 F (40 C) or higher, according to the Mayo Clinic. It requires immediate medical attention to prevent brain damage, organ failure or death.
- Children have a much greater risk of getting heat stroke because their bodies heat up three to five times faster than adults, reports the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In only a few minutes, a child can become dangerously overheated.
- Cars also can heat up incredibly fast. For example, when it's 80 F outside, the inside of a car can reach 99 F in just 10 minutes. Another 10 minutes later, it can be as high as 109 F, according to autoevolution.com.
- Cars can be dangerous even in moderate weather. According to KidsAndCars.org heat stroke deaths in cars have occurred when the temperature was as low as 57 F.

### ***Reminders and other Safety Precautions***

The first and most important rule is: Never leave a child under the age of nine alone in a car, even for just a minute. Not only is this good practice, it's also [the law in 18 states](#). If you drop your child off at day care, you can use your smart phone or computer calendar to send you an alert afterward to make sure you did this. You also could put a favorite toy in the car safety seat, then move it to the front seat when your children are strapped in as a reminder that they are in the car.

Although most heat-related deaths in cars happen when a driver forgets to remove a child, about 30 percent occur because a child was playing in an unattended vehicle, according to KidsAndCars.org. Here are some other ways to protect your child and others:

- Lock the vehicle's doors and trunk at all times—especially at home.
- Teach children not to play in any vehicle and keep your keys in a place they can't reach.
- Dial 911 immediately if you see an unattended child in a car.

Virtually all children's deaths caused by heat stroke in cars are preventable. By being extra careful, you can keep your child cool and safe.

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