

## Coroner: Child's death in hot vehicle accidental

Written by Joseph Lord and Alex Orlando The Courier-Journal 1:16 AM, Jun 20, 2012

The death of an 8-month-old child left for hours in a hot vehicle after his father forgot to drop him off at day care has been ruled an accident.

Lincoln Lindsay was pronounced dead at 6:17 p.m. Monday at his family's home in the 6400 block of Glenwood Road, Jefferson County Chief Deputy Coroner Jo-Ann Farmer said.

Lincoln died from complications of environmental exposure (ambient heat) because of entrapment in a closed motor vehicle, she said.

The infant's parents were questioned Monday by detectives, but no charges have been filed as the investigation continues, Louisville Metro Police spokeswoman Carey Klain said. The names of the parents have not been released because they haven't been charged.

The death happened after Lincoln's father left home about 7:30 a.m. Monday and forgot to drop his son off at day care, instead driving to work in the 9700 block of Ormsby Station Road, Farmer said.

The father didn't realize the child was in the vehicle until he finished work and saw Lincoln inside, Farmer said.

The father "frantically" drove home with the baby — about five miles — and about 5:45 p.m. rushed the boy into the house. The boy's mother is a physician and his aunt is a pediatrician, Farmer said.

Resuscitation attempts failed, she said.

The death has once again brought to the forefront the potentially deadly conditions that occur when a child is left inside a hot car for even a short time. The vehicle's interior can reach 99 degrees in 10 minutes on an 80-degree day, according to Jan Null, a researcher in the Department of Geosciences at San Francisco State University.

Across the nation, tragic stories of children's deaths in unattended vehicles have sparked outrage, but experts say it's all too easily explained.

Amber Rollins, assistant to the president of KidsAndCars.org, a nonprofit organization that advocates child safety in and around cars, said most adults who leave children behind are loving and caring parents. But they get distracted by increasingly hectic schedules and changing routines.

"It's not a failure of love," Rollins said. "It's a failure of the brain."

David Diamond, a professor of molecular physiology at the University of South Florida, echoed that sentiment in a report on KidsAndCars.org.

"Memory is a machine, and it is not flawless," Diamond said. "If you're capable of forgetting your cellphone, you are potentially capable of forgetting your child."

Experts say there is no particular demographic of parents who forget children in cars — it happens across the board, regardless of age, income or race.

Lincoln had lived in a quiet, upscale neighborhood in eastern Jefferson County.

"These types of incidents don't discriminate," Rollins said. "It can happen to anybody."

The one constant, she said, is a change in morning routine that can make frazzled adults forget even the most important things because another thought has upstaged them.

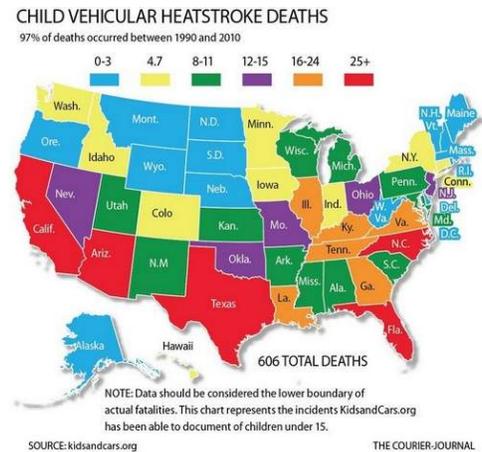
Rollins recalled a 2005 case in Texas in which a 6-month-old girl, Mika, died of heatstroke.

The baby was riding in a rear-facing car seat in the back of her father's car and fell asleep. The father, who had been out of work for weeks after being laid off, got a call from someone with a job prospect.

He took a detour from his regular day-care route, stopping at a post office. He ran into a friend he knew from church and decided to drive to their place of worship to help, with Mika in the back seat. He stayed for hours, forgetting that Mika was in the car.

By the time he returned, she had died.

Rollins said she's seen similar situations happen to an elementary teacher, a veterinarian, a principal — even a pediatrician.



According to the KidsAndCars website, 33 children across the nation died in hot cars last year — 49 in 2010. The website counts five children who have died so far this year.

Between 1990 and 2010, Kentucky alone had 18 children die in cars of heatstroke deaths.

In 54 percent of those car deaths, the child was unknowingly left in the vehicle. In 31 percent, the children got into the vehicle on their own. Nearly 12 percent of children were knowingly left in the vehicle, according to the website.

Most of the deaths occur in warm months — June, July and August. But it can happen during cooler parts of the year, too. Even with the outside temperature around 60 degrees, the sun reflecting off the dash and steering wheel can raise the temperature inside a vehicle to near 100 degrees.

Ronald Paul, chief of pediatric emergency medicine at Kosair Children's Hospital, has seen it before.

The caretaker leaves. The temperature climbs. Trapped in a car seat, the infant sweats until dehydration sets in.

The body temperature climbs — three to five times faster than an adult's, Rollins said.

Eventually, the child can no longer breathe as the body overheats.

Paul has seen infants rolled into the emergency room, pale, drowsy and sick — sometimes unconscious.

"That's if they survive," he said.

Found quickly enough, the child may be OK. But any later, and kidney and heart failure and brain damage may occur.

The result is a brutally harsh lesson for parents, Rollins said.

"Nobody in the world is going to punish a parent for the death of their child more than themselves," she said.

### **Safety tips**

- Never leave children alone in or around cars, not even for a minute.
- Put something you'll need like your cellphone, handbag, employee ID or briefcase on the floor in the back seat.
- Get in the habit of always opening the back door of your vehicle every time you reach your destination to make sure no child has been left behind. This will soon become a habit. It's called the "Look Before You Lock" campaign.
- Keep a large stuffed animal in the child's car seat when it's not occupied. When the child is placed in the seat, put the stuffed animal in the front passenger seat. It's a visual reminder the child is in the child-safety seat.
- Make arrangements with your child's day care or sitter that you will always call if your child will not be there on a particular day as scheduled.
- Keep vehicles locked at all times; even in the garage or driveway, and always set your parking brake.
- Keys and remote openers should never be left within reach of children.
- Make sure all child passengers have left the vehicle after it is parked.
- When a child is missing, check vehicles and car trunks immediately.
- If you see children alone in a vehicle, get involved. If they are hot or seem sick, get them out as quickly as possible. Call 911 immediately.
- Be especially careful about keeping children safe in and around cars during busy times, schedule changes and periods of crisis or holidays.
- Use drive-through services when available (restaurants, banks, pharmacies, dry cleaners, etc.).
- Use your debit or credit card to pay for gas at the pump.

For additional information about keeping children safe in and around vehicles, visit [www.KidsAndCars.org](http://www.KidsAndCars.org).

<http://www.courier-journal.com/article/20120619/NEWS01/306190063>