

## Safety Council warns of threat to kids in hot cars

*It's not quite summer yet 9 children have already died in hot cars. Shannon Rae Green reports that safety experts say that those numbers continue to rise. (USA NOW, USA TODAY)*

[Michelle Healy, USA TODAY](#) 3:05 p.m. EDT June 9, 2014



(Photo: Gannett)

Summer is officially days away, but already at least nine children have died after being left alone in a hot car, and trends from recent years suggest these numbers will probably rise, according to the [National Safety Council](#).

[San Francisco State University's Department of Geosciences](#) estimates that since 1998, there have been at least 615 heatstroke deaths of children left in vehicles, an average of 38 deaths per year. More than half of the total number were children under the age of 2.

Those stats include the latest suspected incident. *The Bradenton (Fla.) Herald* reported Monday that a Sarasota man was charged with manslaughter for allegedly leaving his 2-year-old daughter in a hot car while he went inside and fell asleep. The child had a body temperature of 106 degrees when she was rushed to a hospital Sunday, according to the report. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, says heatstroke is the leading cause of non-crash, vehicle-related deaths for children under the age of 14

Children are at a particular risk for vehicular heatstroke, a form of hyperthermia, because "their body can't regulate temperature as well as adults," says Amy Artuso Heinzen, program manager at the NSC, a non-profit group chartered by Congress.

It doesn't even have to be hot outside for this danger: An infant can suffer heatstroke when the outside temperature is as low as 57 degrees, she says.

A change in routine "is one of the threads that goes through so many of these cases," says Janette Fennell, founder and president of the advocacy group [KidsAndCars.org](#). "It could be a different route that they're taking or the fact that they're not usually the person who drops off the child. The list goes on, but in almost all cases, something changed" that resulted in "a tragic momentary memory lapse."

It doesn't help that the child is in the back seat, often in a rear-facing car seat that's situated behind the driver, quietly asleep and out of view.

"The worst thing you can do is think this can't happen to you," Fennell says. "This happens to the best of parents." Adopting some simple safety tips can save lives. Safety experts recommend:

- Putting your purse, briefcase or other important items on the floor of the back seat in front of the car seat to ensure you open the back door of the vehicle to get your belongings.
- Putting a large stuffed animal in the child seat when it's not in use and moving it to the front seat when your child is in the car. It will serve as a reminder that the child seat is in use.
- Having your child care provider call you any time your child does not arrive.
- Making a habit of looking in the vehicle — front and back — before locking the door and walking away.

Two of the vehicular heat stroke victims this year were 5-year-olds, Heinzen says, a reminder that "this is not just an infant issue" but also a problem that arises when children have access to an unlocked, unattended car.

"About 30% of the kids who die in hot cars got in there on their own," Fennell says. "We really need people to lock their cars and keep their keys and remote openers out of the reach of children."

"And teach children that a car is not a play area," Heinzen says.

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/06/09/hot-cars-child-deaths/10008335/>