

'No safe amount of time' with kids, hot cars

[Tanya Spencer](#) 4:21 PM, Jun 23, 2014 2 hours ago



INDIANAPOLIS - Leaving children alone in warm vehicles is a dangerous mistake too many parents make, and it can be deadly.

Indianapolis EMS physician Dr. Dan O'Donnell said heat is especially dangerous for infants and young children, because they can't regulate their body heat the way older kids and adults can.

"There is no safe amount of time."

O'Donnell said a child's body temperature rises about five times faster than an adult's, and death can occur in as little as 15 minutes.

"You combine that with them being in a car seat and usually bundled up a little bit, it's going to be even more exaggerated, so it's more dangerous," O'Donnell said.

O'Donnell says there is no safe amount of time to leave a child in a car on a warm day, even with the windows cracked.

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"It doesn't take much time for the car to heat up to really dangerous temperatures," he said. "You've really got to be very aware that when you get out of the car, it's time to get your kids out of the car, even if you're going to run in and do something for only a few seconds."

Currently, 20 states have laws with specific language about leaving kids unattended in a hot car, but Indiana does not. Officers do have the ability to arrest parents for child endangerment or neglect at their discretion.

Accidents happen

While there are parents who intentionally leave their children in the car, it also happens accidentally.

Lyn Balfour, one mother who forgot her son in the car with fatal results, said it can happen to anybody.

"It has happened to a NASA scientist at Langley, it has happened to a mathematician, genius in Berkley, California, all across the country."

Balfour said she had a change in her morning routine and she was sure she had dropped her son, Bryce, at daycare. She hadn't, and he died from heatstroke in her backseat.

"I was asking myself, 'I can go to Iraq, I can defend my country, I can manage \$47 million worth of projects with no penny lost, I was awarded a bronze star for that. How can I forget my own child?'"

Balfour now works with kidsandcars.org to help other parents avoid her mistake.

"People tell me all the time, 'There's no way I could ever forget my child.' I was one of those parents," she said.

Thirteen children have died from heatstroke in the U.S. already this year from being left in hot cars; 44 died in 2013.

'Be Safe' safety checklist

A checklist available on kidsandcars.org uses the acronym "Be Safe" to help parents keep their focus on the baby in the backseat and make sure they're not forgotten.

The checklist is [available in PDF form here](#) and includes tips like leaving a purse or briefcase in the back seat, avoiding cellphone use during the drive and asking your childcare provider to call you if your child has not been dropped off on time.

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