

Stopping child deaths in hot cars

These preventable tragedies demand education and technology solutions

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As summer temperatures rise, so does the risk of deadly heat strokes. Of particular concern are children left unattended inside a hot car.

This year, as of mid-July, 17 children have died in hot cars, according to KidsAndCars.org, a safety organization. More than 600 children died from heatstroke in vehicles between 1998 and 2013, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reported.

Children can overheat much faster than an adult, making them especially vulnerable. When outside temperatures are in the low 80s, the temperature inside a car can reach lethal levels in only 10 minutes, even with a window rolled down two inches, the NHTSA says.

Most parents would insist that they'd never forget their child in a hot car, but the risks are greater than you might think. Something as simple as a change in your daily routine can be a distraction that leads to a fatal mistake. Adults who are caring for newborns and small children are often dealing with great stress and a lack of sleep, which can impair judgment and the ability to multitask.

At Consumers Union, the policy and advocacy arm of Consumer Reports, we believe that child deaths in hot cars are preventable tragedies that demand solutions driven by education and technology. Public awareness is crucial. There are [important safety tips](#) to remember, such as 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.

Parents and caregivers need to be routinely reminded of the dangers so it becomes second nature to check the car whenever exiting. Put something in the backseat that you would need, such as a purse, briefcase, or cell phone, so you get in the habit of checking, or stick a reminder note on your dashboard.

While these reminders can help, we also strongly believe that more research is needed to stimulate innovation and technology to prevent deaths and injuries. That's why we're urging people to [sign a White House petition by KidsAndCars.org](#) to stop child deaths in hot cars.

The petition calls for the Obama administration to authorize the U.S. Department of Transportation to provide financing for research and development of technology to alert drivers. These types of tools should be thoroughly tested and evaluated to find the most feasible and effective solutions. Then we think the best technology should be installed, whether in cars or child seats, to prevent children from being left behind in vehicles.

The risks and consequences can be tragic, but by spreading the word and pushing for more research and better technology, we hope we can prevent more of these tragedies in the future.

We hope you'll take a moment to [sign the petition here](#).

<http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/news/2014/07/stopping-child-deaths-in-hot-cars/index.htm>