

2 Babies Dead: How Does a Parent Forget a Child in a Hot Car? 2013 in Review

The deaths of two children in the region over the holiday weekend underscore the dangers of leaving young ones in hot cars.

Posted by [Todd Richissin](#) (Editor) , December 18, 2013 at 10:39 AM



2013 in Review.

Editor's Note: As the year winds down, Woodbridge Patch is looking back at some of the stories that made you talk, cry, laugh or just scratch your head. This column first ran July 8, 2013 **by Beth Lawton.**

The details connected to the deaths of two babies over the holiday weekend -- in separate incidents but under similar circumstances and only a short drive from each other in Virginia and Maryland -- could hardly be more tragic: In both cases, police say, a relative forgot the babies in a car with outside temperatures hovering around 90 degrees.

Unfortunately, such cases are not rare.

The most recent Virginia case occurred Friday in Arlington when a mother reportedly [forgot to drop off her 8-month-old son at daycare and went to work](#). The little boy was pronounced dead on arrival at INOVA Alexandria hospital, where she took him hours later, as soon as she realized her mistake. The [mother has been charged](#) in connection with the case.

The Maryland case also occurred Friday, in Lansdowne, just south of Baltimore. There, a [16-month-old girl was mistakenly left in a car for four hours by a relative](#), who police say had forgotten to drop her off at daycare before he took a nap. She was pronounced dead shortly after arriving at St. Agnes Hospital near Baltimore.

How often does this happen?

According to [KidsandCars.org](#), babies dying in hot cars [happens about 38 times per year across the United States](#). The deaths in Virginia and Maryland are the 17th and 18th so far in 2013 in the United States. The highest number of heat-related vehicle deaths in the United States occurred in 2010—one of the hottest summers on record in the United States.

In 2009, Washington Post columnist Gene Weingarten wrote a Pulitzer Prize-winning story [attempting to answer how parents can forget their own children in cars](#).

“What kind of person forgets a baby?,” Weingarten asked. “The wealthy do, it turns out. And the poor, and the middle class. Parents of all ages and ethnicities do it. Mothers are just as likely to do it as fathers. It happens to the chronically absent-minded and to the fanatically organized, to the college-educated and to the marginally literate. In the last 10 years, it has happened to a dentist. A postal clerk. A social worker. A police officer. ... A Protestant clergyman. ... An assistant principal. It happened to a mental health counselor, a college professor and a pizza chef. It happened to a pediatrician. It happened to a rocket scientist.”

When outside temperatures are in the 60s, the temperature inside a parked car can rise to more than 110 degrees, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Temperatures can rise 20 degrees in just 10 minutes inside a car.

“Even with a window rolled down two inches, if the outside temperature is in the low 80s° Fahrenheit, the [temperature inside a vehicle can reach deadly levels in only 10 minutes](#),” the NHTSA reports. Further, children’s bodies do not regulate heat as well as adults. “In fact, when left in a hot vehicle, a young child's body temperature may increase three to five times as fast as an adult. High body temperatures can cause permanent injury or even death.”

How Not to Forget: Reminders and Tips

This tragic mistake can happen to even the best, most conscientious parents and guardians. Here are some tips that may help from KidsandCars.org:

- Put your purse, briefcase or whatever you must take out of the car with you next to the child—not in the front seat with you.
- Situate a mirror in the backseat so you can see children easily who are still small enough to be in rear-facing child seats.
- “Look Before You Lock” – make it a habit of opening the back door and looking inside every single time you get out of your car, even if you think you’re sure you don’t have a child with you.

- Put a large stuffed animal in the child's car seat when it's not occupied, and move the stuffed animal to the front seat when the child is in the car seat. The stuffed animal will serve as a visual reminder in the front seat with you.
- Make sure your child's daycare center or babysitter calls you if your child does not show up as scheduled.

Technology Solutions

At least two manufacturers ([Suddenly Safe 'N' Secure Systems, Inc.](#) and [Baby Alert International](#)) make "[car seat alarms that are designed to remind parents](#)" when they turn off the car that their child is in the car seat. The systems work by having a weight sensor on the car seat and a device on the parent's keychain, according to CBN News. However, [no technology solution is absolutely infallible](#) and any efforts to remind parents about the presence of a sleeping child in the car should be combined with some of the reminders and tips above.

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