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End Hot Car Child Deaths: Grieving Families Join Members of Congress and Safety Advocates on National Heatstroke Prevention Day. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg Must Issue the “Hot Car” Regulation Without Delay.

Washington, DC, May 1, 2023 - Grieving families, members of Congress, Kids and Car Safety, Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, and a memory science expert join together to call for the child protection “hot cars” provision enacted in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act ([IIJA, Pub. L. 117-58](#)) to be advanced quickly and to ensure effective detection and alert technology is mandated.

More than **1,050 children** have died from heatstroke in hot cars since 1990, and at least another 7,300 survived with varying types and severities of injuries, according to data collected by Kids and Car Safety.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), which is the agency within the U.S. Department of Transportation with the mission of saving lives, preventing injuries, and reducing economic costs, has already missed publishing the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) self-imposed deadline. With children at unnecessary risk of death and injury every day, it is urgent that NHTSA meets the Congressionally mandated deadline for the final rule to be issued in November of this year.

“Our nation is suffering from an epidemic of hot car deaths. Since 1990, more than 1,000 children have died in a hot car. We know that technology exists to alert a driver when a child or even a pet is left in their car. You get a warning when you leave your keys in the ignition. You should get a warning when a child is left in the backseat. I am proud that my legislation to require auto makers to include this safety feature in all new vehicles was signed into law as part of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. We are urging the U.S. Department of Transportation and the National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration (NHTSA) to swiftly do the rulemaking for this law. The faster they do, the sooner all our vehicles will be safer for our families,” **said Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky (D-IL-9th), Ranking Member of the Innovation, Data, and Commerce Subcommittee in the U.S. House of Representatives.** “Thank you to Kids and Car Safety for all the work you do to protect children from vehicle-related accidents. I also want to say a special thanks to all the advocates who have taken their personal pain and turned it into purpose. We could not do this without you. Together we will make our cars, and our children, safer.”

“We’re approaching summer and very soon, cars will become death traps if kids are left inside them. Absent-mindedness is not a crime, but the systemic failure to protect children is reprehensible. Seatbelts, air bags, better construction of cars have already saved countless lives and this simple step – a detection sensor – will in fact save lives,” **said Senator Blumenthal (D-CT).** “The success that we’ve had in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act is a major accomplishment, but the U.S. Department of Transportation is lagging in promulgating this rule. We can and must do more.”

“We simply cannot let the DOT and Secretary Buttigieg ignore these Congressionally mandated requirements as children continue to die in hot cars,” **said Janette Fennell**, president and founder of [Kids and Car Safety](#). She continued, “No one thinks a hot car tragedy can happen to them, which is why we need effective technology as standard equipment in all vehicles as

quickly as possible. It is heartbreaking to know there are families out there right now with their beautiful children who will lose them by summer's end in a preventable hot car tragedy. Enough is Enough! We must DETECT TO PROTECT."

In November 2021, the IIJA was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Biden. It included a provision that addresses hot car tragedies by requiring technology in new passenger vehicles.

GM, Nissan, Subaru, Acura, Buick, Genesis, Honda, Ford, Toyota, Mitsubishi, Chevrolet, Cadillac, GMC, Infiniti, Kia, Lincoln, Hyundai all offer simple end-of-trip reminder systems that operate using door sequencing technology that provides an audio and visual alert if the driver opens the back door prior to driving. This type of system would not provide a reminder alert in a number of common scenarios. For example, if you stopped to get gas and did not open the back door while stopped, you would not get a reminder when you get to your final destination. Additionally, a system like this does not have the ability to detect the presence of a child alone inside a vehicle and would not protect children who got into a vehicle and became trapped inside ([25% of hot car deaths](#)).

The [differences between simple end-of-trip reminder systems and effective occupant detection systems](#) could mean the difference between life and death. In fact, it already has. Kids and Car Safety has documented five children who have died in vehicles with inadequate end-of-trip reminder technology. If those vehicles had occupant detection, those children might still be alive today.

In 2021, Thomas Cestia, of New Iberia, LA died in a 2020 GMC Sierra four-door pickup truck with an end-of-trip reminder system. Thomas' Mother, **Pamela Cestia**, stated, "My husband drove his truck three times that day and never once heard an alert to remind him that my son was in the back seat. I later learned that this system does not **detect** children, it senses the opening of a rear door only. There are literally no words that can even begin to describe the heartache that my family and I feel every single day. Right now, automakers have a choice. They can choose to add more effective systems to their vehicles today they should. They exist and they are cost-effective. What are they waiting for?"

In June, 2022, **Laura Beck** of Richmond, VA lost her son, Anderson, to a hot car death followed by the death of her husband, Aaron, who took his own life upon discovering their son in his back seat. She stated, "Aaron was so proud to be a papa to Anderson and watching them play and bond was truly magical. Every day for those 18 precious months of his life, we doted on our baby boy. Now, I stare at the pictures and the videos I took of our family and wonder how we got here. Occupant detection and alert technology exists and is readily available to install in ALL vehicles. This technology would have saved my son's life. It would have also saved my husband's life. WHY isn't this already in every single vehicle? WHY do we have to wait for more lives to be destroyed before action is taken?"

Occupant **detection** and alert technology costing less than \$50 is [currently available](#) and provides comprehensive and compelling solutions to end these senseless tragedies.

Cathy Chase, President, Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety stated, "With motor vehicle crash fatalities skyrocketing and children in preventable peril of hot car tragedies every day, it is unconscionable that auto manufacturers, with limited exceptions, are not putting technological solutions into cars as standard equipment. In sharp contrast, the industry has spent billions of dollars in the race to develop and produce autonomous vehicles (AVs), a technology with unproven safety benefits. This National Heatstroke Prevention Day, we urge Secretary Buttigieg to issue final rules requiring hot car detection and prevention systems as well as other proven safety systems, like comprehensive automatic emergency braking (AEB), in all new vehicles to reduce the outrageously high death and injury toll."

"A technological solution is essential because, in the majority of cases, children are unknowingly left by caring and devoted parents or caregivers" said, **Dr. David Diamond**, a professor in the Cognitive, Neural, and Social Division of the Department of Psychology at the University of South Florida and an expert on the neuroscience of hot car deaths. Dr. Diamond continues, "It is important to stress that these parents do not have a reckless disregard for the care of their children. Rather, common factors like a change in routine, lack of sleep, or a phone call can all have an effect on even the most responsible parents. From a brain science perspective, parents can, through no fault of their own, lose awareness of the presence of a child in the car. That is why it is imperative that there be a system to detect the presence of a child in a vehicle. This is a modern phenomenon which requires a modern solution."

While Kids and Car Safety, Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, and partners continue to push for technology in all vehicles to end hot car deaths, advocates are also committed to educating families and helping them learn how they can safeguard their children until they have lifesaving technology as standard equipment in their vehicles. Funded by State Farm Insurance, Kids and Car Safety released three PSAs aimed at educating the public about these predictable and preventable tragedies.

[View video of today's press conference](#)

Hot Car PSA Videos:

[Child gets into hot car, becomes trapped](#)

[Child Unknowingly Left in a Hot Car](#)

[What To Do if You See a Child Alone in a Vehicle](#)

Hot Car Resources:

[Hot car dangers fact sheet](#)

[Differences between rear seat reminder alert only & occupant detection](#)

[Occupant detection technology demonstration video](#)

Memos charts, graphics, child stories, and other hot car resources can be found at <https://www.kidsandcars.org/how-kids-get-hurt/heat-stroke/>

Hash tags

#DetectToProtect #HeatstrokeKills #LookBeforeYouLock

Speaker remarks from press event:

- [Janette Fennell, President of Kids and Car Safety](#)
- [Cathy Chase, President, Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety](#)
- [Dr. David Diamond, Professor of Psychology, Director, Neuroscience Collaborative Program, University of South Florida](#)
- [Pamela Cestia of New Iberia, LA whose son Thomas died in 2021 in a hot car](#)
- [Laura Beck of Midlothian, VA whose son Anderson died in 2022 in a hot car and whose husband Aaron took his own life upon discovering Anderson in his vehicle](#)

Kids and Car Safety is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to keeping young children and pets safe in and around vehicles.

Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety is an alliance of consumer, medical, public health, law enforcement, and safety groups and insurance companies and agents working together to improve road safety in the U.S. Advocates' mission is the adoption of federal and state laws, policies and programs that prevent motor vehicle crashes, save lives, reduce injuries, and contain costs.

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