

---

## Automatic transmission cars can kill your child

If a kid turns the ignition to listen to the radio, some cars can shift into gear. 'Today' consumer correspondent, Janice Lieberman, examines this

**TODAY** Updated: 1:47 p.m. CT Nov 14, 2006

An automatic car can slip into gear, even when the motor is off and your foot is not on the brake. All you have to do is turn the key in the ignition, so it's in what's called accessory mode, which lets you listen the car's radio, roll down a window, or turn on the lights. Having the ignition in accessory mode also means that you could accidentally shift the car into gear. This can be a deadly problem if a child turns the key to listen to the radio.

When the car starts moving, a child can become scared and jump, or fall, out of the vehicle and get run over. At least 100 children have been injured or killed this way. Some consumer groups say there's a simple safety device that would prevent automatic cars from inadvertently shifting into gear. But several car makers have not installed it, so millions of cars on the road today can injure or even kill children.

Car makers have known for years about the dangers of accidental gear shifts in automatic cars. We talked to Beth Eimbinder about an incident 30 years ago, when her younger brother accidentally knocked their family car into gear. Luckily neither sibling was injured, but she's concerned that it could happen to her child. So we asked Eimbinder's young son, Max, to show us if he could slip a parked vehicle into gear. Max was able to shift the gear of the family's 2005 Chevy Suburban, which then rolled down about 10 feet down the driveway before being stopped.

Currently, there are over four million Suburbans like that one on the road as well as millions of other cars, which lack a safety feature called break transmission shift interlock device or BTSI. This part prevents automobiles from shifting into gear, unless the driver's foot is on the brake. Consumer advocates say the part costs less than \$15. Virtually all foreign cars are equipped with the BTSI, but advocates say Detroit lags behind.

"In general, we're seeing that the General Motors, the Ford, the Chrysler products, it's kind of spotty which vehicles have it and which models don't," says Janette Fennell, president of the nonprofit safety organization, [Kids and Cars](#).

But that could soon change. At least 26 U.S. Senators are behind a bill that would require all car manufactures to make the BTSI standard on new vehicles effective immediately. Car manufacturers, both foreign and domestic, have agreed to a voluntary installation of BTSI in all their vehicles by 2010, but if this bill passes they would be required to make the change much sooner.

Here are a list of cars without BTSI in all key modes:

### **General Motors**

- Saturn ION
- Cadillac CTS
- Pontiac GTO
- Chevrolet Express
- GMC Savannah
- Chevrolet Equinox
- Pontiac Torrent
- Saturn VUE
- Chevrolet Silverado Classic
- GMC Sierra Classic

*A General Motors statement: "All GM vehicles will have Brake Transmission Shift Interlock in Accessory mode by 2008, two years ahead of the requirement."*

### **Chrysler**

- Jeep Liberty

*A Chrysler statement: "The Jeep Liberty will get an updated BTSI when the vehicle is refreshed, which is in the near future."*

### **Ford**

*The car maker wouldn't provide us with a list.*

*A Ford statement: Only 10 percent of its 2007 vehicles don't have BTSI devices.*

### **BMW**

- X3
- Z4

*A BMW statement: Its automobiles will be ready for the 2010 agreement.*

The car makers also told us a car is not a safe place to leave a child unattended. Here are some tips to keep you kids safe:

- Never leave your keys in the car.
- Try your car out in park and in accessory mode to find what your car is truly equipped with.
- If you're buying a new car, ask for a test drive and try it out yourself.
- Remember to check rental cars.

Kids and Cars says you should check your vehicle to see if it can be shifted into gear without your foot on the brake. To make sure your vehicle has the brake transmission shift interlock feature that works in all key positions, here's what to do:

- Get into your car.
- Put emergency brake on.
- Make sure vehicle is on flat surface.
- Make sure no object or person is in front of or behind your vehicle.
- Put keys in ignition in off position; turn key to “accessory position.”
- Attempt to shift vehicle into gear without putting your foot on the brake – if vehicle shifts into gear, then BTSI does not work in that key position and you should be aware that your vehicle can roll if it is inadvertently shifted into gear.
- Try this test in all key positions. If vehicle shifts into gear without having the brake peddle depressed, then *beware* — your vehicle does not have BTSI in all key positions and could roll away. *Janice Lieberman is the “Today” show’s consumer correspondent. She joined NBC News as a consumer reporter in 1999. She is author of “Tricks of the Trade: A Consumer Survival Guide.” She is a graduate of Rutgers University.*

© 2007 MSNBC Interactive

URL: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/15622405/>