

Car Seat Safety: Protecting Your Child from Hyperthermia

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Editor's note: Car seat safety inspections will be offered around Vermont between April 28 and October 20. For a list of inspection dates, visit www.beseatsmart.org.

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As the summer season approaches and the warm weather returns, it's time to talk about another kids and cars topic. In January, I wrote about [dangers of children wearing winter coats and buntings](#) in car seats. This time, we're going to talk about hyperthermia.

[Hyperthermia](#), also known as heat stroke or heat prostration, is defined as an overheating of the body.

Unrelieved hyperthermia can lead to collapse and death, particularly in the elderly. High body temperature can develop rapidly in extremely hot environments, such as when a child is left in a car in the summer heat. Hot temperatures can also build up in small spaces where the ventilation is poor, such as attics or boiler rooms.

Prevention via air conditioning, ventilation, and drinking extra water is key for vulnerable persons. In emergency cases, injections of saline solution and rapid cooling of the body may be needed.

Hyperthermia can also lead to death in children who are trapped in cars, either due to self-entrapment or who've been forgotten by a caretaker.

But hey, we're in Vermont! It doesn't get that hot here! I don't need to worry about leaving my kid in the car so he can continue his nap, right?

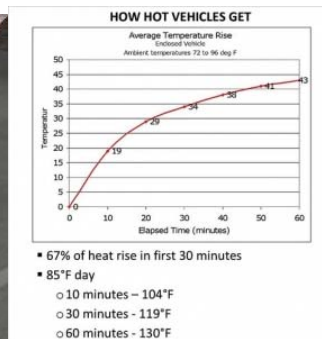
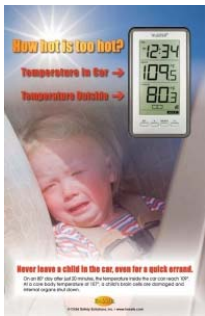
Unfortunately, this is incorrect. Children have died because of hyperthermia in February when the outdoor temperature has been as low as [57 degrees](#).

Courtesy [lmsafe.com](#)

But that won't be me, I'm careful with my kids! I'd never leave them in the car!

Again, this is unfortunately not the case. The best intentioned and most loving parents have forgotten their children. Typically, it happens when a change in schedule occurs and a parent who's not in the habit of dropping off at daycare gets tasked with it. On [this link](#) is a story of a loving parent who was distracted and forgot his son was left in the car.

Cars quickly generate heat. Watch this next animation to see how quickly a car gets unsurvivalably hot.



[Click here for animation](#)

Courtesy of Jan Null @ <http://ggweather.com/heat/index.htm>

Because of this heat rise, and because children's bodies gain heat at 3 to 5 times the rate of adults, we should all be very careful that our children never get left in a vehicle.

So what do can you do to offset this risk? The answer is not to forward face your child, as some might assume. In fact, forward facing children have also died due to hyperthermia. Instead, the answers are in the following points, courtesy of KidsandCars.org.

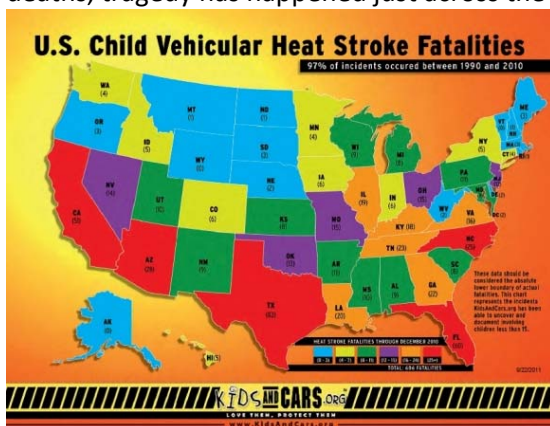
Reducing the risk of hyperthermia

- Never leave children alone in or around cars – not even for a minute.
- If you see a child alone in a vehicle, get involved. If they are hot or seem sick, get them out as quickly as possible. Call 911 or your local emergency number immediately.
- Put something you'll need, like your cell phone, handbag, employee ID, lunch or brief case, on the back seat floor.



- Get in the habit of always opening the back door of your vehicle every time you reach your destination to make sure no child has been left behind. This will soon become a habit.
- Keep a large teddy bear in the child's car seat when it's not occupied. When the child is placed in the seat, put the teddy bear in the front passenger seat. It's a visual reminder that anytime the teddy bear is up front, you'll know the child is in the back seat in a child safety seat.
- Make arrangements with your child's day care center or babysitter that you will always call them if your child will not be there on a particular day as scheduled. This is common courtesy and sets a good example that everyone who is involved in the care of your child is informed of their whereabouts on a daily basis. Ask them to phone you if your child doesn't show up when expected. Many children's lives could have been saved with a telephone call from a concerned child care provider. Give child care providers all your telephone numbers, including that of an extra family member or friend, so they can always confirm the whereabouts of your child.
- Use drive-through services when available. (Restaurants, banks, pharmacies, dry cleaners, etc.)
- Keep vehicles locked at all times; even in the garage or driveway and always set your parking brake.
- Keys and/or remote openers should never be left within reach of children.
- Make sure all child passengers have left the vehicle after it is parked.
- Be especially careful about keeping children safe in and around cars during busy times, schedule changes and periods of crisis or holidays.
- When a child is missing, check vehicles and car trunks immediately.

Remember, just because we are here in Vermont and have been lucky enough not to have one of these deaths, tragedy has happened just across the border in adjoining states.



Courtesy Kidsandcars.org

Remember these life-saving tips

- Be aware that leaving your child in the car can cause a life-threatening event.
- Put an object that you take with you every time, such as your purse or wallet, next to your child whenever you ride with them.
- Have extra care when the schedule gets changed, as this is the most risky time for caregivers to forget the children in their care.

Other resources

[What is heat stroke?](#) By Dr. Paul Leffler

[Heat Hurts Facebook page on Hyperthermia](#)

[Child Safety Solutions, Inc.](#)

[Kids and Cars.org](#)

[NHTSA's page on Hyperthermia](#)

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