

## Keeping kids out of hot cars

Friday, July 6, 2012

A few weeks back, we ran a piece about the **dangers of leaving kids in overheated cars**. Here are some tips on how to make sure that never happens to you.

The safety group KidsAndCars.com calls it “Look Before You Lock” – if you drive your kids or grandkids around in the back seat of your car on a regular basis, make it a practice to always open the back door and look in the back seat before you leave your car. Do it at home, at the supermarket, at work, at the daycare center, everywhere. Think of it as your personal ‘no child left behind’ rule. Kids heat up faster in a hot environment; a sleeping child left in a car seat or a toddler who climbs back in while playing is at risk.

“You can also use a stuffed animal,” says Christopher Haines, D.O., director of the Department of Emergency Medicine and the medical director of the Transport Team at St. Christopher's Hospital for Children in Philadelphia. “Keep it in the car seat when no one’s sitting there, put it in the front seat when your child is in the car seat. It’s a reminder.”

Other strategies recommended by **KidsAndCars** include:

- Put something you'll need like your cell phone, handbag, employee ID or brief case, etc., on the floor board in the back seat.
- Make arrangements with your child’s day care center or babysitter that you will always call if your child will not be there on a particular day as scheduled.
- 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.
- When a child is missing, check vehicles and car trunks immediately.
- 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.
- Be especially careful about keeping children safe in and around cars during busy times, schedule changes and periods of crisis or holidays.
- Use drive-thru services when available – at restaurants, banks, drug stores, dry cleaners, ice cream shops.
- Use your debit or credit card to pay for gas at the pump.

Posted by Sari Harrar @ 1:06 PM

[http://www.philly.com/philly/blogs/healthy\\_kids/161581155.html](http://www.philly.com/philly/blogs/healthy_kids/161581155.html)

## Kids in overheated cars

Thursday, June 21, 2012

Across the nation, **five kids** have died this year after being left in hot cars, trucks, vans or SUVs. When I first read about this, I thought “I’d never do that. Nobody I know would ever do that. What kind of parent *leaves* a baby or child in a hot car?” Then I found out that it happens to parents just like me – and perhaps you.

Since 1998, 532 babies, kids and even preteens and young teens have died from hyperthermia because they were trapped in a hot vehicle. Over half of these tragedies *didn’t* happen because a parent deliberately left them there; 30 percent of the time, kids got into cars on their own and weren’t discovered in time, according to the safety group **KidsAndCars**. And 54 percent of the time, parents didn’t realize they’d left a sleeping child – or one who couldn’t speak up – in the back seat. “It happens to the most loving, protective parents,” the group notes on its Web site. “It has happened to a teacher, pediatrician, dentist, postal clerk, social worker, police officer, nurse, clergyman, electrician, accountant, soldier, assistant principal, and even a rocket scientist. It can happen to anyone.”

In one close call, the young son of two police officers quietly got into the family’s unlocked minivan, parked at home in the driveway. After a frantic search, a neighbor suggested checking the van – where they found their 4-year-old son in the front seat. “The doors are very quiet when they open and shut. When the door opened, Nicholas went in and

pushed the button closing the door behind him,” the parents say. “When we asked him why he didn't come out, he said the door locked. The doors were unlocked when my husband got him out and Nicholas knows how to press the button to get out the same way he got in. We don't know if he was hiding, playing, really locked in ... It doesn't really matter. What matters is he could have died. The heat inside a closed vehicle is deadly, especially to a small child.”

In another close call, a sleep-deprived mom thought she'd dropped the baby off at daycare – the backseat was silent and she couldn't see into the rear-facing baby seat – and was arrested when the baby was found hours later in her car at work. Her baby lived. And she was brave enough to tell her story online.

I asked Christopher Haines, D.O., director of the Department of Emergency Medicine and the medical director of the Transport Team at St. Christopher's Hospital for Children in Philadelphia, what parents should know about kids, cars and hot days. He told me that babies, toddlers and kids are less heat-tolerant than adults – they have bigger heads and more skin surface area relative to their body size and breathe faster, so they can dehydrate faster. They also have a harder time regulating body temperature to stay cool. In fact, a child's body temperature can rise **3 to 5 times** faster than an adult's under hot conditions.

Hot conditions aren't just 100-degree days in a closed car. “Parents may think it's safe to leave a baby or young child sleeping in the car for 15 or 20 minutes when it's 60 degrees outside, but, at that temperature, inside the car can rise 20 degrees in first 10 minutes under those conditions and can rise to over 100 degrees even in 60-70 degree weather,” Haines says. “The car heats up too much even if you leave the windows cracked. You could have a death in 10 to 15 minutes if it's 80 degrees outside. It's never, ever safe to leave kids in the car for this reason.”

Over the years, he's been in the emergency room four or five times when this has happened. “It happens most often with infants, but parents have to be careful with older kids, too. Especially those who can't let you know that it's hot and they're thirsty – like kids with learning disabilities or autism.”

Next, we'll talk about ways to prevent this – and when to step in if you think a kid in someone else's car is in trouble.

Posted by Sari Harrar @ 4:41 PM [Permalink](#) | [4 comments](#)

[http://www.philly.com/philly/blogs/healthy\\_kids/Kids-in-overheated-cars.html](http://www.philly.com/philly/blogs/healthy_kids/Kids-in-overheated-cars.html)