

# Child safety advocates warn parents after 2 babies die in hot vehicles

## 'It could happen to anyone,' advocates say

Posted by [Erin Mulvaney](#) on [July 20, 2012 at 1:43 pm](#)



*Jasmine Mendieta Van Herpen and Nathan Mendieta found their way into their mother's car and died from hyperthermia on August 20, 2008.*  
(Courtesy of Kids and Cars)

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The 2-month-old who died after he was left in a minivan last weekend in Brazoria County is the second such case Texas this year, in the state that typically leads the nation in such deaths.

Prosecutors said no charges have been filed against the mother, who was attending an event on Sunday when she realized she left her baby in the minivan in the 7000 block of Brazoria County Road 865. The baby was taken to the hospital and died less than 24 hours after he was discovered.

The case will be referred to a Brazoria County grand jury to determine what, if any, charges may be filed, said Brazoria County District Attorney Jeri Yenne. The next grand jury meets in August.

In May, a Sugar Land father Leland Jacobson, 41, left his 7-month-old baby in the backseat of his pickup in 89-degree weather. The baby later died on May 3. Investigators are still reviewing the case to determine whether charges will be filed, said Fort Bend County District Attorney John Healey.

In the U.S. this year, there have been at least [12 children who have died after being in hot cars, trucks, vans and SUV's](#).

Child safety advocates say many will condemn parents who accidentally leave their children behind, but the problem is more common than most realize.

Amber Rollins, spokeswoman with [Kids and Cars](#), a Kansas-based national safety organization, said between 1991 and 2011 there were 87 deaths in Texas and 614 in the U.S. total. She said near-misses can also be dangerous and cause long-term damage, which is not always documented.

"It happens countless times every single day, in every single city," Rollins said. "I think one of the most important points in that it can happen to anybody...It's heartbreaking. The death of a child is one of the most horrid things you can think of, and it's worse when the parent is responsible."

The organization works with families that have lost children in such cases. She said in these cases, parents are under a lot of stress, they usually have changed their routines and they might not be getting enough sleep. She said people are sometimes too judgmental in these cases, and do not realize it could easily happen to anyone.

Rollins said she there is no rhyme or reason why parents are charged, or not, after a death. She said it depends on the prosecutors and law enforcement officers, who will determine whether it was an accident or negligence.

The inside of a car heats up quickly. If the temperature is 100 degrees outside, a car can heat up to 140 degrees in 15 minutes, [according to data from the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services](#).

Incidents increase during the summertime, but Rollins said the inside of a car can be dangerous in lower temperatures also. Babies have a harder time regulating their body temperature and can heat up three times faster than an adult, she said.

Austin resident Kristie Reeves-Cavaliero lost her daughter Ray Ray last May after the 1-year-old's father Brett Cavaliero forgot to drop her off at daycare.

On May 25, Ray Ray slept late. Her parents scrambled with their normal routine out of whack.

Later that day, the couple met up for lunch, driving and talking about how cute Ray Ray had looked that morning. It was “tropical day” at her daycare so she had worn a special outfit. Suddenly, Cavaliero told his wife to turn the car around and head back to his office where his car was parked immediately. Reeves-Cavaliero said when he asked her to run a red light, she knew something was wrong.

“I can’t remember if I dropped Ray Ray off at daycare this morning,” he told her.

They sped back to his office and found her in his car, where she had been for about three hours. It was 94 degrees that day.

“When you are in that process and you’re there looking at your child with her lips, blue, it’s like a freight train going through your head,” she said.

Neither the couple nor the doctors were able to resuscitate her and the child died. Cavaliero faced charges for his daughter’s death, but the grand jury did not indict him, his wife said.

“There was no one on earth that loved that child more than he did, except maybe me,” she said. “I never imagined a man in so much pain...She was the apple of his eye.”

After the child’s death, the couple did research, realizing they weren’t the only ones to make such mistakes. The couple started [Ray Ray’s Pledge](#), a child safety advocacy group, which encourages daycare centers to call parents if the child is absent and also gathers data and statistics. Reeves-Cavaliero said parents who forget to drop their child off at daycare count toward about 25 percent of all child hot car deaths in the U.S.

The couple is now expecting twin girls.

“Most people can’t imagine the horror of this,” Reeves-Cavaliero said. “Most haven’t heard about this kind of death...People are human and they do forget sometimes.”

[A “Heat Study” conducted by the Department of Geosciences at San Francisco State University](#) observed the issue and released these safety recommendations for parents:

- NEVER LEAVE A CHILD UNATTENDED IN A VEHICLE. NOT EVEN FOR A MINUTE !
- IF YOU SEE A CHILD UNATTENDED IN A HOT VEHICLE CALL 9-1-1.
- Be sure that all occupants leave the vehicle when unloading. Don’t overlook sleeping babies.
- Always lock your car and ensure children do not have access to keys or remote entry devices. IF A CHILD IS MISSING, ALWAYS CHECK THE POOL FIRST, AND THEN THE CAR, INCLUDING THE TRUNK. Teach your children that vehicles are never to be used as a play area.
- Keep a stuffed animal in the car seat and when the child is put in the seat, place the animal in the front with the driver.
- Or place your purse or briefcase in the back seat as a reminder that you have your child in the car.
- Make “look before you leave” a routine whenever you get out of the car.
- Have a plan that your childcare provider will call you if your child does not show up for school.

<http://blog.chron.com/newswatch/2012/07/child-safety-advocates-warn-parents-after-2-babies-die-in-hot-vehicles/>