

## **New Research Says Current Warning Systems Designed to Detect Children Left in Vehicles Are Not Reliable**

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### *Public Education and Information Campaigns on Child Heatstroke in Vehicles Essential to Preventing Future Tragedies*

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) today released the results of a new study on aftermarket consumer products intended to prevent a child from being unintentionally left behind in a hot vehicle. The study found that currently available products are limited in their effectiveness and are unreliable as a stand-alone preventative measure for addressing child heatstroke tragedies.

"With summer temperatures hitting record highs around the country, child heatstroke is clearly an issue of national concern," said U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood. "Public education is the best way to help parents and caregivers prevent tragic accidents and keep their children safe."

Heatstroke is the leading cause of non-crash, vehicle-related deaths for children under the age of 14. Data from the San Francisco State University Department of Geosciences show 33 children died last year due to heatstroke – medically termed "hyperthermia" – while there were at least 49 deaths in 2010. As part of a comprehensive approach to this issue, NHTSA commissioned CHOP to evaluate a number of commercially available aftermarket products that connect to child restraints and are advertised to help parents and caregivers remember children who they may have unintentionally left behind in a parked vehicle.

The results of the study released today indicated limitations in currently available technology and products designed to detect children left behind in vehicles. Among a range of technological limitations are inconsistencies in arming sensitivity; variations in warning signal distance; potential interference with the devices' notification signals from other electronic devices; susceptibility of the systems to misuse scenarios involving spilled liquid beverages; and disarming of the devices due to a slumping or otherwise out-of-position child.

In addition, many of the products required extensive efforts by parents and caregivers to set-up, monitor, and operate, which could give parents and caregivers using the devices a false sense of security. The technologies would also not address the 20-40 percent of children who are killed when they gain access to the vehicle without an adult present or are not in child restraints, since the devices are child restraint based.

"Everything we know about child heatstroke in motor vehicles is that this can happen to anyone from any walk of life – and the majority of these cases are accidental tragedies that can strike even the most loving and conscientious parents," said NHTSA Administrator David L. Strickland. "While many of these products are well intended, we cannot recommend parents and caregivers rely on technology to prevent these events from occurring."

NHTSA strongly urges parents and caregivers to take the following safety precautions and ask themselves, "Where's baby? Look before you lock" as part of its national campaign to address this issue:

- Never leave a child unattended in a vehicle – even if the windows are partially open or the engine is running and the air conditioning is on;
- Make a habit of looking in the vehicle – front and back – before locking the door and walking away;
- Ask the childcare provider to call if the child does not show up for care as expected;
- Do things that serve as a reminder a child is in the vehicle, such as placing a cell phone, purse or briefcase in the back seat to ensure no child is accidentally left in the vehicle, writing a note or using a stuffed animal placed in the driver's view to indicate a child is in the car seat; and,
- Teach children a vehicle is not a play area and store keys out of a child's reach.

NHTSA also urges community members who see a child alone in a vehicle to immediately call 911 or the local emergency number. The child should be removed from the vehicle as quickly as possible and rapidly cooled with water if in distress.

Read the CHOP report on technology to prevent heat stroke to children in motor vehicles.

To learn more about NHTSA's "Where's baby? Look before you lock." campaign, visit [www.SaferCar.gov/heatstroke](http://www.SaferCar.gov/heatstroke).

Other NHTSA Sites [Safercar.gov](http://Safercar.gov) [TrafficSafetyMarketing.gov](http://TrafficSafetyMarketing.gov) [EMS.gov](http://EMS.gov) [911.gov](http://911.gov) [StopImpairedDriving.org](http://StopImpairedDriving.org) [Distraction.gov](http://Distraction.gov)

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