

Leaving a child alone in a car can quickly turn deadly

by TRIPP UNDERWOOD on JUNE 25, 2013



In the past 15 years, more than 550 children across the United States have died from heatstroke after being left alone in a car. That's an average of 37 lives—an entire classroom full of children—lost each year to a completely avoidable accident.

Most of the deaths occur when a parent simply forgets his or her child is in the back seat. It sounds hard to believe, but parenting is hard work, and sometimes when people get frazzled careless mistakes are made. Data show that heatstroke tragedies happen more often when there is an interruption to the parents' daily routine.

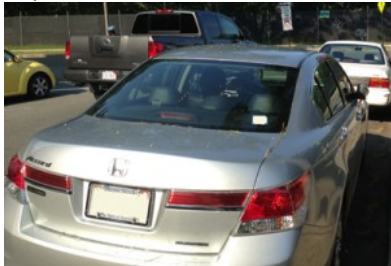
For instance, imagine your alarm clock didn't go off one morning and you're running very late to work. Somewhere between merging in and out of traffic and checking your email on your phone, you completely forget to drop your child off at daycare. Already 10 minutes late for a meeting you jump out of the car and rush inside, too preoccupied to notice your child quietly sleeping in the backseat.

Considering vehicles heat up quickly—as much as 19 degrees in 10 minutes—a car can go from uncomfortable to dangerous in minutes, especially for young children whose body heat can spike up to five times faster than adults. Once their internal temperature hits 104 degrees, the major organs begin to shut down; when it reaches 107 degrees, the child could die.

And it doesn't need to be the dog days of summer for this to occur. Even on a partially cloudy, 80-degree day, the inside of a closed car can quickly jump to 100 degrees.

What you can do to avoid heatstroke in children

“For starters, never purposely leave your child alone in a car. Not even for a second, even with the windows cracked,” says Heidi Almodovar MSN, RN, CPNP-AC/PC, a



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trauma nurse practitioner at Boston Children's Hospital. “And make sure to keep your car locked when you're not in it, so kids don't get in on their own.”

To avoid accidentally forgetting a child in a car, experts recommend putting an important item—like a cell phone, wallet or briefcase—next to the child's car seat

each time you get behind the wheel. Pretty soon the action of turning around and reaching into the backseat to grab something before exiting the vehicle becomes routine, even when you're in a rush or are otherwise distracted.

And even though some of our modern technology can be blamed for distracting parents in these situations, it also can come in handy to avoid them.

“If you're worried you might be the type of person who could accidentally leave a child in a car, try setting an alarm on your phone to ring a few minutes after you're scheduled to drop him or her off,” Almodovar says. “That way even if you do somehow forget to take the child out of the vehicle, you'll be reminded almost immediately.”

But being vigilant about making sure you do everything in your power not to leave a child alone in a car may not be enough—make sure your children's babysitters and other caregivers know that it's never alright to leave the child unattended in a vehicle and have them practice the same reminder techniques you use.

Finally, if you see someone else's child alone in a car, don't be afraid to take action. “If you see a child by himself or herself in a vehicle, the best thing you can do is to call 9-1-1 immediately,” says Almodovar. “Wait by the vehicle so help can find you quickly. If you're worried the child is in immediate danger, tell the 9-1-1 operator and follow his or her directions.”

<http://childrenshospitalblog.org/leaving-a-child-alone-in-a-car-can-quickly-turn-deadly/>