


Kids Are Still Dying After Being Left In Hot Cars

An uptick in incidents suggests 2013 may be on track for tragic year

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Never leave a child unattended in a car (flickr, melinnis).

A child dies every nine days in the U.S. after being left too long in a hot car, according to the advocacy group [Kids And Cars](#).

There's considerable worry the deaths will be more frequent this summer. Fifteen children have already died from vehicular heatstroke so far in 2013. That puts the country on pace to match the most tragic year ever, when 49 children died in such incidents in 2010.

On average, 38 children die every year, according to the [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#).

In most cases, it's not willful neglect that leads to such tragedies, but small changes in routine that lead to forgetfulness. A quick stop for an impromptu errand or a phone call that distracts a driver before a planned daycare stop can turn deadly.

"Absolutely the worst thing a parent can do is to think that this won't happen to you," said Janette Fennell, president and founder of [Kids And Cars](#). "I can guarantee you that the parents this has happened to never thought about this in their wildest imagination. They found out too late that this does not discriminate."

There's growing demand for new devices that help parents or caregivers remember, such a key fob that beeps if a car seat remains buckled for a certain period of time after the engine turns off. But last July, a study released by [NHTSA](#) concluded such devices were inconsistent and unreliable in their performance.

Nor did they address the root cause of death – the heat.

Even in mild outdoor conditions, the inside of a car can reach lethal temperatures in mere minutes. Children are particularly vulnerable to high heat, because their bodies heat up at a rate much faster than adults, [medical experts tell the Orlando Sentinel](#).

Over the past three years, 114 children have died in vehicular heatstroke incidents, and the average has increased considerably since 1998.

The reason for that may be an unintended consequence for a measure designed to protect children. After high-powered [airbags](#) killed 184 children between 1990 and 2000, [safety](#) regulators pushed parents to move children to the back seat, where they also urged parents to make car seats rear facing for children less than two years old.

Kids are safer in the backseat from airbags, but they're also out of sight and out of mind.

NHTSA research found that [more than half of the vehicular heatstroke victims](#) were unintentionally forgotten. Thirty percent of the victims were playing and got locked in a vehicle. Seventeen percent of the victims were intentionally left by a parent or caregiver who didn't realize they had placed children in danger.

Southern states like Texas and Florida lead the way in the number of deaths, but every state except Vermont and Alaska have had children die from vehicular heatstroke since 1990. Fifty-four percent of the fatalities involve children younger than two.

"It really has a lot more to do with tiny changes in routine, and that's just enough," Fennell said. "We're fragile already, and just that little interruption can often be traced to the reason this happens."

Here are some prevention tips:

- Keep your briefcase or workbag in the back seat of the car, next to your child's car seat. It's an easy way to remind yourself to open a back door.
- Keep your cell phone on the floorboard of the back seat.
- Keep something beside you in the front seat, such as a stuffed animal, as a reminder the child is in the back seat.
- Make an arrangement with your daycare provider that they will call should you not show up on a day the child is scheduled for care.
- When a child is missing, check vehicles and trunks immediately.
- See a child in car alone on a hot day? Get involved. If they seem tired or sick, call 911 immediately.

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