

Kids in cars and hot weather — a lethal combination

JULY 8, 2013 9:48 PMBY: [FAIRFAX NEWS](#)



It happens every summer. Children are left unattended in cars, either purposely or through forgetfulness. The results are often tragic. Each year, an average of 38 children die of heat stroke after being left in cars on hot summer days.

With temperatures in the 90s in Fairfax this week — and rising the rest of the summer — the most important thing to remember if you're a parent is to look before you lock your car.

It's not a problem that only happens elsewhere. Just this past weekend a local [8-month-old baby was left in a car and died](#) in Arlington.

How does it happen?

There are several factors that contribute to children being inadvertently forgotten by caregivers. Paramount is the fact that our brains are not keeping up with the demands of our busy lives. The most common factors include a change in one's normal routine, lack of sleep, stress, fatigue, distractions and hormone changes. When these factors combine, the ability for the brain to multi-task is diminished.

As parents know, life with newborns and small children is full of stress, sleep deprivation and distractions. And young children, especially babies, often fall asleep in their car seats; becoming quiet, unobtrusive little passengers. And sadly, for babies with rear-facing seats, the seat looks the same from the front seat — whether occupied or not.

Not even for a minute

Some people may think it's OK to leave children in cars to run an errand, so they crack the window open. Some people may literally forget about a quiet, sleeping child in the back of their car as happens dozens of times a year across the country. Regardless, know the dangers. A child's body temperature rises 3-5 times faster than an adult's.

Here are some tips to help you remember:

- Put something you'll need like your cellphone, handbag, employee ID or brief case, etc., on the floor board in the back seat.
- Get in the habit of always opening the back door of your vehicle every time you reach your destination to make sure no child has been left behind. This will soon become a habit. Kids and Cars calls this the "Look Before You Lock" campaign.
- Keep a large stuffed animal in the child's car seat when it's not occupied. When the child is placed in the seat, put the stuffed animal in the front passenger seat. It's a visual reminder that anytime the stuffed animal is up front you know the child is in the back seat in a child safety 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.
- Use drive-thru services when available (restaurants, banks, pharmacies, dry cleaners, etc.) instead of "running in for just a minute."
- And if you see a child alone in a vehicle, get involved and call 9-1-1 immediately. If they are hot or seem sick, get them out as quickly as possible.

For additional information about ways to keep children safe in and around vehicles, visit www.KidsAndCars.org.

<http://fairfaxnews.com/2013/07/kids-in-cars-and-hot-weather-a-lethal-combination/>