

## In wake of Burbank boy's heat stroke death, experts underscore car safety tips

September 01, 2013 | By Jennifer Delgado | Chicago Tribune reporter, [jmdelgado@tribune.com](mailto:jmdelgado@tribune.com) Twitter @jendelgado1

Heat stroke deaths like the one Friday involving a 20-month-old Burbank boy who was left in a hot vehicle are rare, statistics suggest, but child-safety and health experts say they underscore the steps parents can take to prevent them. Police said Ivan Villa died Friday after being inadvertently left in his family's car for 21/2 hours in 90-plus degree weather. His death was ruled a homicide caused by heat stroke and child neglect, but no charges were filed because the parents didn't know the boy was inside the car.

Often, parents who are sleep-deprived or are dealing with a new routine can become distracted and forget their child is in the back seat, said Janette Fennell, founder and president of the advocacy organization KidsAndCars.org. The tragedy strikes parents of all backgrounds, ages and economic circumstances, she said.

"The most important thing for people to understand is it can happen to anyone. Everyone wants to resist that," Fennell said. "We're dealing with our brains and our memories, which aren't perfect."

Precautions for parents and caregivers can be as simple as looking in back seats but also include them putting something important like a cellphone or work ID in the back seat of a vehicle, Fennell said. They should also tell their day care provider to call them or other relatives if the child doesn't show up when expected, she added.

Younger children are more susceptible to falling ill or losing consciousness from high temperatures because their small bodies absorb more heat, said Dr. Rahul Patwari, an assistant professor of emergency medicine at Rush University Medical Center, who has treated patients for heat exhaustion and heat stroke.

Small children also sweat less, making it harder for their bodies to cool off, and have more fat to trap the heat, he added. But when they're left in hot cars, all of those factors are dwarfed by their inability to leave the vehicle, Patwari said.

"Really no one can handle that degree of heat, whereas an adult or an older child would be able to unlock the door and get out," he said.

KidsAndCars.org has tracked more than 675 hot-car deaths of children nationwide since it began collecting data in 1990. In Illinois, 21 children left unattended in sweltering cars have died since then, including Villa and a 23-month-old boy from O'Fallon, near St. Louis, in June.

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