

## 'Look Before You Lock' to avoid heat stroke-related child deaths

June 22, 2013 | By Desiree Stennett, Orlando Sentinel - [dstennett@tribune.com](mailto:dstennett@tribune.com) or 407-420-5447 or @desi\_stennett on Twitter

In less than two months, four Florida children died after they were left inside broiling cars when outdoor temperatures topped 80 degrees. With 15 similar child deaths nationwide since May, that number has already doubled that of the same time frame last year.

Now that summer is here and temperatures in Central Florida soar past 90 degrees most days, Janette Fennell — founder of a nonprofit dedicated to preventing injury and death to children in and around motor vehicles — reminds parents to "Look Before You Lock."

Checking the back seat before you leave your car is "something you should get in the habit of doing whether or not you have children," said Fennell, who founded KidsAndCars.org.

In the majority of cases in which kids die in hot cars, she said, they are usually younger than 2 and are left behind by family members.

On average, 37 children die annually across the nation as a result of being left inside a hot car, according to a ongoing study conducted by San Francisco State University that was published in 2005 by the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Florida is second only to Texas in the most heatstroke-related child deaths per year, the study said. There have been at least 64 reports in Florida since 1998.

Temperatures can spike as much as 20 degrees within 10 minutes after a car engine is turned off if the vehicle is parked in direct sunlight, Fennell said.

### In the Florida cases so far this year:

- A 3-year-old boy died after he was forgotten in a vehicle for about three hours in Manatee County while his family attended a funeral Saturday.
- A Miami-Dade County mom was charged with manslaughter after her 11-month-old son was left alone in a car May 16 and he died from heat exposure.
- On June 2, a Pensacola 2-year-old who wandered inside the family car was found dead on the floorboard hours after he was reported missing by family members. No charges were filed that case.
- In another recent Florida case, a Highlands County mother faces manslaughter and child-neglect charges after her 18-month-old daughter, who was left in a hot car for about two hours last month, suffered heatstroke and died.

Adriana Espinosa went to meet her boyfriend in the parking lot of a Holiday Inn on May 24. She left her 4-year-old daughter with a baby sitter but had no one to care for her youngest child, Josefina, so she brought the girl along for the ride, her arrest-warrant affidavit said.

The 23-year-old mom told deputies that she gave the little girl, who was still strapped into her car seat, a sippy cup of water before she turned the car ignition off and got into her boyfriend's car parked in a nearby space.

Espinosa left the fan blowing just after noon on a 93-degree day, the affidavit said. But two hours later, Espinosa's car battery was dead, Josefina's water was hot and the little girl was foaming at the mouth and gasping for air with a body temperature of 102, according to police records.

Although many people link this kind of death with irresponsible parenting, Fennell said, that's not true in every case, and the greatest mistake any person can make is to assume it could never happen to him or her.

"If your brain has the ability to forget your cellphone, you have the ability to forget your child," Fennell said.

As an example, she cites Angel Cerrato, a 15-month-old boy from Fresno, Calif., who was traveling in the car with his parents June 7. Each parent thought the other had taken the baby out of the sport utility vehicle, and when they found him more than an hour later, he was dead. No charges were filed that case, which authorities ruled an accident.

### Safety tips for parents

Remember the following "Look Before You Lock" BE SAFE tips:

**Back seat:** Put something in the back seat so you have to open the back door when leaving the vehicle: cellphone, employee badge, handbag, etc.

**Every child** should be correctly restrained in the back seat.

**Stuffed animal:** Move it from the car seat to the front seat to remind you when your baby is in the back seat.

**Ask your baby sitter or child-care provider** to call you within 10 minutes if your child hasn't arrived on time.

**Focus on driving:** Avoid cellphone calls and text-messaging while driving.

**Every time you park your vehicle,** open the back door to make sure no one has been left behind.

SOURCE: KidsAndCars.org

[http://articles.orlandosentinel.com/2013-06-22/news/os-florida-baby-deaths-hot-car-20130622\\_1\\_hot-car-car-seat-janette-fennell](http://articles.orlandosentinel.com/2013-06-22/news/os-florida-baby-deaths-hot-car-20130622_1_hot-car-car-seat-janette-fennell)