

Winter Advisory: Don't Leave Kids Alone in the Car

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You often hear about children being left in cars in the middle of the summer, but did you know that it can be equally dangerous during the winter months? As tempting as it might be to leave your child in the car for “just a second,” especially if the child is sleeping, it is not only dangerous, but can be deadly.

While the temperature hovered at 24 degrees, and the wind chill 11, two young children, ages 4 and 5, were left alone in a car on a winter day outside a Wal-Mart while their father did some shopping. A Wal-Mart employee noticed the children, called 911, and stayed with the vehicle until help arrived. The video surveillance helped determine that the kids were left in the vehicle for about 20 minutes. Fortunately, the children were not harmed, but they could have suffered from cold related injuries such as frostbite.

This is a scenario that has become far too common. Without heat to keep the child warm in the cold temperatures, a child's body temperature can drop rapidly causing the hypothermia. Kids already have a lower body temperature than adults, so they are more susceptible to this deadly condition; leading to frostbite to ears, nose, fingers, and toes. It doesn't take long for the damage to become severe enough to lose those body parts.

Children should never be left in a car alone, not even for five minutes. Cars are not daycares or playscapes; they are not babysitting services. If the keys are left in the ignition, children may be able to start the car. They can push buttons, put the vehicle in gear, or disengage the brake. A child may even climb out of the vehicle and wander away, be injured, or abducted. The child could swallow something toxic. Babies could get tangled in the seat belt and hang themselves. These dangers are real; why put a child at risk?

For more information on keeping children safe in and around vehicles, visit kidsandcars.org. Learn the dangers and how to prevent them.

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