

## **Never Leave Your Child Alone in a Car Summer Brings Dangers of Children and Heatstroke**

With the approach of summer in Texas, the danger of children dying from being left unattended in vehicles increases, warns Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. By following the steps in the Safe Kids ACT campaign, we can help reduce needless and preventable deaths. ACT stands for: **A**void heatstroke-related injury, **C**reate reminders, and **T**ake action. The campaign is designed to link together these simple heatstroke prevention steps.

The problem is that temperatures in parked vehicles rise very quickly. According to figures from San Francisco State University's Department of Geosciences, in just 10 minutes, the temperature inside of a vehicle can increase by almost 20 degrees.

A child's body temperature rises three to five times faster than an adult's, making children more vulnerable to a deadly condition known as heatstroke. Heatstroke can occur at body temperatures above 104 degrees. Even mild outside temperatures can pose a threat, but with Texas temperatures climbing into the upper 90s each day, the danger becomes even greater.

Statistics from San Francisco State University show that Texas leads the nation with the highest number of vehicle heatstroke deaths during the years 1998-2012, with 84 deaths during that time. Nationally, there have already been four deaths due to heatstroke in 2013, with two having occurred in Texas. Last year in Texas, there were five vehicle heat-related deaths. Nationally, there were 32, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).

In more than half of the cases during that time period, the death was due to the child being 'forgotten' by the caregiver. Such deaths are preventable when parents take precautions to make sure that children are not left alone in vehicles and cannot gain access to unlocked vehicles.

Although many parents may think that this will never happen to them, it is a tragedy that can and has happened to many families. It is important that parents talk to their babysitters, grandparents, and others who care for their children to make them aware of the dangers of hyperthermia deaths.

For parents with iPhones, check out the free iPhone application called "Baby Reminder." This program allows you to set the days and time intervals in which you usually drive with your children and provides for an alert to be sent to you reminding you not to forget your baby in the car. It can be downloaded via iTunes at <http://itunes.apple.com/il/app/baby-reminder/id468332744?mt=8>. Of course, no phone app can guarantee your child's safety.

Look for the *ACT* and *Never Leave Your Child Alone in a Car* campaign promotions, and follow these safety tips from National Safe Kids:

- **Avoid heatstroke-related injury and death.**
  - Never leave your child alone in the car, even for a minute.
  - Consistently lock unattended vehicle doors and trunks.
- **Create reminders and habits that give you and your child's caregiver a safety net.**
  - Establish a peace-of-mind plan. When you drop off your child, make a habit of calling or texting all other caregivers, so all of you know where your child is at all times.
  - Place a purse, briefcase, gym bag, cell phone, or another item in a back seat that will be needed at your next stop.

- Set the alarm on your cell phone or computer calendar as a reminder to drop your child off at childcare.
- Take action if you see an unattended child in a vehicle.
  - Dial 911 immediately, and follow the instructions that emergency personnel provide – they are trained to determine if a child is in danger.

Remember, children should never be left alone around cars. In addition to heat risks, there are other safety concerns with children in and around cars including back-overs, the risk of children releasing the gear shift or engaging electric windows, or becoming trapped inside vehicles or trunks.

For more information, visit the National Safe Kids website at <http://www.safekids.org/safety-basics/safety-guide/kids-in-and-around-cars/never-leave-your-child-alone.html>, or check out the National Highway Traffic Safety's *Where's Baby* campaign at <http://www.safercar.gov/parents/heatstroke.htm>.

You may also contact the AgriLife Extension Office at 903-473-4580 or visit us at [rains.agrilife.org](http://rains.agrilife.org). We are also on Facebook at [Facebook.com/pages/Rains-County-Family-Consumer-Sciences](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Rains-County-Family-Consumer-Sciences). Go and “Like” our page to keep up with the latest news, events, and programs offered by Family & Consumer Sciences in Rains County.

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