

## **Beware of Heatstroke Danger for Children in Hot Cars Never leave children alone in or around cars**

As we approach summer in Texas, the danger of children dying from being left unattended in vehicles increases, warns Jennifer Page, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service agent, Llano County. Safe Kids USA has launched a campaign titled, ACT. 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 hyperthermia, or 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 1998-2013, with 92 deaths during that time. Nationally, there have already been two deaths due to heatstroke so far in 2014, with one having occurred in Texas. Last year in Texas, there were five vehicle heat-related deaths. Nationally, there were 44, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

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. According to Safe Kids, one-third of the heat-related deaths in 2000 were due to children becoming trapped in a vehicle they had crawled into.

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.

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 provided by emergency personnel – 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. According to the Insurance Institute of Highway Safety, approximately 39 percent of backover deaths occurred at home in the driveway, an apartment parking lot, or in a townhome complex. Drivers in backover and frontover deaths are often family members or family friends of the injured child.

For more information, visit the website <http://nlyca.safekidsweb.org/resources/>.