

## **Children and Vehicles: Information and Prevention**

According to Safe Kids USA, more than 120 children (most three and younger) have died from heat stroke after being trapped in a vehicle. General Motors research has found that these children were left behind in a closed, parked car by parents or caregivers, or they gained access to the car on their own and could not get out. According to KidsGrowth.com, a recent study has shown that even on a 73 degree day, a dark car reached 100 degrees after 15 minutes and 110 degrees in 30 minutes. It took 35 minutes for a white mini-van to reach 100 degrees. According to Safe Kids USA, 30 children die each year from heat-related illness after they have been left alone in a parked car. A small child's body temperature can increase three to five times as fast as an adult's. The results can include permanent organ damage or death.

### **Children should never be left alone in cars even when parents are running errands. Kids in Cars, a Missouri-based national non-profit organization, offer these Safety Guidelines:**

- Plan ahead to use drive thru services such as pharmacies, restaurants, and libraries.
- Call dry cleaners and other businesses to schedule pick up and drop off services at your vehicle.
- Make advance arrangements for your child care provider to meet you at your vehicle. Plan extra time into your pick up and drop off times to bring all children inside with you at one time.
- Use your debit or credit card at gas pumps.
- Ask grocery store clerks to load your bags in your vehicle and return the grocery cart.
- If possible, leave children with a responsible adult. Arrange baby-sitting with your neighbors to give you an hour to run errands.

### **Safe Kids USA offers the following guidelines to prevent children overheating in vehicles:**

- Make sure you check the temperature of the child safety seat surface and safety belt buckles before restraining your children in the car.
- Use a light covering to shade the seat of your parked car. Consider using windshield shades in front and back windows.
- Never leave your child in an unattended car, even with the windows down.
- Check to make sure all children leave the vehicle when you reach your destination, particularly when unloading and loading. Don't overlook sleeping infants.
- As a reminder your child is in the back seat, place a teddy bear in the passenger seat beside you.
- If your child gets locked inside a car, get him out and call 9-1-1 or your local emergency number immediately.
- Get immediate medical help any time a child's skin is hot to the touch or if a child has a seizure or becomes disoriented after exposure to high temperatures.
- If you find a child left alone in a parked vehicle, call 911 and let some air into the car, even if you have to break a window.

### **Safe Kids USA offers the following guidelines to prevent children becoming entrapped in a vehicle trunk:**

- Teach children not to play in or around cars.
- Keep car keys out of reach and out of sight.
- Always lock car doors and trunks, especially when parked in the driveway or near the home.
- Keep the rear fold-down seats closed to help prevent kids from getting into the trunk from inside the car.
- Be wary of child-resistant locks. Teach older children how to disable the driver's door locks if they unintentionally become entrapped in a motor vehicle.
- Contact your auto dealership about getting your vehicle retrofitted with a trunk release mechanism.

### **For more information, visit these web sites:**

- Safe Kids USA, [http://www.usa.safekids.org/tier2\\_rl.cfm?folder\\_id=980](http://www.usa.safekids.org/tier2_rl.cfm?folder_id=980)
- Kids In Cars, [http://www.kidsincars.org/m\\_nav/safety\\_tips.html](http://www.kidsincars.org/m_nav/safety_tips.html)
- KidsGrowth.com, <http://www.kidsgrowth.com/resources/articleDetail.cfm?id=1618>
- CBS News, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2007/07/30/earlyshow/living/parenting/printable3109965.shtml>