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Kids in Hot Cars – Recipe for Summer Tragedy

The California Office of Traffic Safety Warns about Hyperthermia

SACRAMENTO – During California summers, the dangers for children being seriously injured or even dying after being left unattended inside a hot car rise as fast as the temperature. The California Office of Traffic Safety is cautioning parents and care givers that hyperthermia (heatstroke) can become a dangerous reality, even after just a few minutes of a child being left alone in a car.

“Even on an 80 degree day, a car’s internal temperature can skyrocket and reach well above 125 degrees in as little as a half hour,” said OTS Director Rhonda Craft. “It’s important that children are never left unattended in a vehicle for any amount of time, even with cracked windows, which do little to keep the car cool.”

Just 10 minutes in hot sun can raise the internal temperature of a car by nearly 20 degrees, over 30 degrees in a half hour, and nearly 45 degrees in an hour. Children’s body heat regulatory systems are less efficient than an adult’s, allowing them to overheat 3 to 5 times faster. Injuries due to hyperthermia in hot cars can cause ailments including permanent brain injury, blindness and the loss of hearing, among others.

Hyperthermia deaths and injuries often occur after a child gets into an unlocked vehicle to play without a parent’s knowledge. Other incidents can occur when a parent or care giver encounters a break in normal routine, inadvertently forgetting a sleeping infant in a rear-facing car seat in the back of the vehicle. Whether a child is left unattended in a car with or without the driver’s knowledge, it’s still a crime in California. Senate Bill 255, also known as Kaitlyn’s Law, was enacted in 2001 and makes it illegal to leave children unattended in a motor vehicle.

To help parents and guardians follow the law and keep their children safe year-round, OTS is offering the following prevention tips and reminders:

- Never leave your child unattended in a hot vehicle, not even for a minute
- Don’t allow your child to play in an unattended vehicle. Teach them that the vehicle is not a play area

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- For parents of young children, place a needed item for your next stop, such as your cell phone or purse on the floor in front of your child's safety seat. This will help to remind you that your child is in the car when you retrieve the needed items
- Set a reminder or alarm on your cell phone that reminds you to drop off your child at school or day care, or have a loved one call to ensure that the drop-off occurred
- Ask day care providers to call if your child is ever late being dropped off
- Develop a routine before exiting your car; always look in the front and back of your vehicle before locking the doors – every time
- Always lock your car doors and do not give children access to keys or keyless entry devices
- If your child is missing, be sure to check all vehicles and trunks
- If you see an unattended child in a hot vehicle, call 911 immediately; a child in distress due to heat should be removed from the vehicle as quickly as possible and rapidly cooled

By following these simple tips and reminders, you can ensure that you are taking the right steps to keeping your children as safe as possible. For more safety tips and information on OTS campaign efforts, please visit the OTS Facebook page at www.facebook.com/CaliforniaOTS or follow OTS on Twitter @OTS_CA. For more information on all OTS efforts, visit www.ots.ca.gov

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