

## AAP News Parent Plus

INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

### Children left in cars can die of heatstroke in minutes

There is a common theme in the heartbreaking stories of parents whose children died after being left in a hot car. The family's routine had changed that day, and they simply forgot their child was still in the back seat.

Heatstroke deaths are the leading cause of non-crash-related auto fatalities for children ages 14 and younger, according to national data. On average, 37 children die each year. More than half are under 2 years old.

Most heatstroke deaths occur during the summer, but deaths also happen in other seasons and in cooler weather. Children are more susceptible to heatstroke because their body heats up three to five times faster than an adult's.

On a 72-degree day, a parked car's interior can climb to a deadly temperature in less than 30 minutes. It doesn't take much more than an outside temperature in the 50s for a car's interior to heat up. You might think that opening the windows would help, but beware. Research confirms that the car's interior temperature rises just as quickly with the windows open or shut.

Signs of heatstroke that require immediate medical attention include shock, collapse, a temperature over 104 degrees Fahrenheit, fainting, seizures and not being able to walk, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). Before severe heatstroke, children in hot cars suffer from heat illness symptoms, including weakness, dizziness, nausea, feeling faint, headache and an increased body temperature.

The AAP offers the following tips to prevent heatstroke in vehicles:

- Do not leave children unattended in a vehicle, even with the windows open. Not only can it be deadly, but leaving children alone in a car might be illegal in your state (<http://bit.ly/1HeK45o>).
- Lock the car, even when parked on the driveway or in the garage, to keep children from hiding and playing in it. Keep keys out of children's reach. If a child is missing, check the pool first and then the car.
- Look before you lock the car. Think of a way to remind yourself to always check the back seat. For example, place your belongings (e.g., a work ID, briefcase or purse) in the back of the car so you must look there every time you park.
- Call 9-1-1 for help if you see a child trapped in a car. Stay with the child and car until help arrives.

— Trisha Koriath

