



## Deadly heat: kids and pets left behind in cars

By Tom Wawzenek | Tuesday, July 16, 2013

Every summer, many preventable deaths occur when children are left unattended in a hot vehicle. According to the nonprofit safety group, [Kids and Cars.org](#), more than 600 US children have died this way since 1990. And in a recent article in [USA Today](#), seven children died in hot cars in four states during a 16-day period in the month of May this year.



These preventable deaths happen for a number of reasons. In many cases, parents or caregivers leave their child in the car for what they believe will be a quick stop at a store. In other cases, parents may simply forget that they have left their child in the vehicle. Also, it is not uncommon for kids to get into unlocked cars, become confused by the door's opening mechanism or become trapped in the trunk, and are unable to get out before heatstroke occurs.

Whatever the reason, children are in grave danger when left in a locked car for even a short period of time. Even when the temperature outside is a cool 72 degrees F., temperatures inside a car with its windows closed can increase by 20 degrees in the first ten minutes and by 40 degrees within 20 to 30 minutes.

The danger is compounded by the fact that a child's temperature rises three to five times faster than an adult's. Children are less able to lower their body heat by sweating, and body temperatures can quickly rise to dangerous levels. Children under four years old are among those at greatest risk for heat-related illness or death.

[WebMD](#) warns that there is simply no safe amount of time to leave children alone in the car — just a few minutes can be fatal or cause permanent injuries.

### **It's not just the heat**

The dangers of leaving kids unattended in a car aren't just limited to kids getting overheated. Simply leaving the car running and the air conditioning on doesn't make your child any safer, even if it is just for a few minutes. A child left alone in a car can be abducted or even get caught in a window by playing with the "open" and "close" buttons. Or a child may unwittingly set the car in motion.

Here are some tips from the National Highway Traffic Administration for parents and caregivers:

- Always check the front and back seats before leaving the car.
- Put your purse or briefcase or something you need by the child's carseat so you don't leave your child behind.
- Always lock your vehicle's doors and trunk when it is not in use so kids can't get in without you knowing about it. Also keep the car keys out of reach.
- Never leave kids in the car even with a window partially open. Even with a window rolled down a couple of inches, temperatures inside the car can still reach deadly levels within minutes.
- If you see a child alone in a vehicle, call the police immediately.

### **Pets are also at risk**

These same dangers also await pets left alone in a hot car. It takes only minutes for a pet left in a vehicle on a warm day to succumb to heatstroke or suffocation — animals can sustain brain damage or even die from heatstroke within 15 minutes. Again, even when the temperature is just 72 degrees F. outside, the temperature inside the car can increase by 20 degrees in the first ten minutes and by 40 degrees within 20 to 30 minutes.

Rolling down a window or parking in the shade doesn't guarantee protection because temperatures can still quickly climb into the danger zone. And a lowered window may afford your pet the chance to escape or bite a pedestrian walking by.

If you see a dog left alone in a hot car in a parking lot, write down the make and model of the car and its license plate number and try to have the owner paged in the nearest building or store. If a pet is left alone in a hot car on the street, call the local humane authorities or the police.

If you have your pet in your car and need to make some errands, here are some tips from the American Society for the [Prevention of Cruelty to Animals](#):

- Use the drive-up if possible when you need to make a banking transaction or need to stop for a bite to eat.
- Shop at pet-friendly stores. Many stores now allow owners to bring their dogs into their establishment.
- Never think of any errand as being a quick one. Any errand can take longer than anticipated, and even a few extra minutes is enough to kill or severely impair your pet.

Often, the best of action is simply to leave your pet at home. Many owners feel guilty about leaving Fido on the couch, but it is better in the long run for your pet to be comfortable and safe.

*Planet BP welcomes your [feedback](#).*