



Cotton County Health Department

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Summer Heat Prompts Safety Concern for Children

Summer is here and with it comes the increased risk of heat stroke, especially for children left in vehicles. Children's bodies overheat easily making them increasingly susceptible to heat-related illness, especially heat stroke. Heat stroke is the leading cause of non-crash, vehicle-related death for children. In the United States, a child dies from heat stroke in a vehicle every 10 days.

The Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) offers the following safety tips to keep Oklahoma children safe in cars during extreme heat:

Never leave children alone in a vehicle for any length of time, even with the windows open. A child's body temperature can increase three to five times faster than an adult. If the outside temperature is 101 degrees, the temperature inside of a vehicle can rise above 140 degrees. Even if the temperature is cool and the windows are cracked, a vehicle's interior temperature can rise almost 20 degrees within the first 10 minutes.

Always check the back seat to ensure you remove all children from the vehicle when reaching your destination. More than half of cases of children dying in hot cars occur when a distracted driver forgets there is a child in the back seat.

- If transporting a child is not a normal part of your routine, set up a reminder to get the child out of the car - a phone call from a friend, an alarm on your phone, a note on the steering wheel or dashboard - or place something you will need (such as a purse, briefcase, or cell phone) in the back seat next to the child.
- When transporting children and cargo, always remove the children before removing the cargo.
- Talk to your child care provider to ensure there is a system in place to prevent leaving children alone in a vehicle.

Always close and lock vehicle doors and trunks when the vehicle is not in use. One-third of heat-related child deaths occur when a child is playing in an unlocked vehicle and becomes trapped inside. Store vehicle keys out of reach and out of sight of children. Teach children not to play in or around vehicles, especially the trunk of a vehicle. Show them how to use the emergency trunk release if they become trapped inside.

If a child is observed alone in a vehicle, the public is encouraged to call 911 immediately. If the vehicle is locked and forcible entry is necessary because the child is in danger, state law permits an observer to forcibly enter the vehicle to rescue the child. Once the child has been removed from the vehicle, stay with the child in a safe place, within close proximity to the vehicle, until emergency responders arrive.

To receive more information on summer vehicle safety, contact the OSDH Injury Prevention Service at (405) 271-3430 or visit <http://ips.health.ok.gov>, click on "Fact Sheets" and then "Kids in Hot Cars".

Additional information on summer safety can be found on the following websites:

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
<http://www.safercar.gov/parents/index.htm>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<http://www.cdc.gov/extremeheat/children.html>

Kids and Cars
<http://www.kidsandcars.org/>

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