

Children Are Dying in Hot Cars, but These Tragedies Can Be Eliminated with Proven Prevention Strategies

Safe Kids Worldwide, JPMA, and Safety Advocates Collaborate to Empower Families

MT. LAUREL, N.J. and WASHINGTON ([PRWEB](#)) April 23, 2021 -- Warmer temperatures are upon us and car interiors heat up quickly, placing unattended children and other vulnerable passengers at unnecessary risk. Since 1998, an average of 38 children die of heatstroke in cars each year, and more recently, in each of two consecutive years – 2018-2019 – 53 children lost their lives in hot cars.

During the pandemic when more people stayed home, the number of children unknowingly left in vehicles was lower, but overall incidents of small children getting into parked cars and becoming trapped stayed consistently high. All of these deaths could have been prevented through proven strategies and tips.

As travel patterns and household routines return to more typical levels, experts from Safe Kids Worldwide (SKW) and the Juvenile Products Manufacturers Association (JPMA) remind caregivers about the dangers of leaving children alone in a car and offer proven strategies and tools to help families avoid these tragedies.

Research shows that vehicle interior temperatures become 19 degrees warmer than the outside air in just 10 minutes and up to 55 degrees warmer in a few hours. Children’s body temperatures warm at a rate 3 to 5 times faster than adults, so they are at higher risk. When the body reaches 104 degrees, heatstroke begins and cells are damaged, and at 107 degrees internal organs begin to shut down. In the same vehicle temperature study, researchers found cracking the windows had little effect and reduced interior temperature by less than 3 degrees.

“The enclosed environment of a car gets much hotter than outside temperatures,” said Joseph M. Colella, director of child passenger safety for JPMA. “Even on cooler days, sunlight provides a constant source of heat, and a car can heat up to more than 100 degrees after just 20 minutes, which can be deadly for a child.”

“These types of tragedies can happen to anyone, and most of the cases happen to caring and conscientious parents who are devastated by their loss,” said Torine Creppy, president of Safe Kids Worldwide. “Our greatest wish is that heatstroke won’t claim the life of another child, and we’re calling on everyone to be a part of the solution. Whether you are a parent, caregiver, or a concerned bystander, you can help save a life.”

“Park. Look. Lock.” means each time a parent or caregiver parks their vehicle, they should look in the front seat and back seat for children, and never leave a child unattended in a vehicle. Once a parent confirms that all passengers are out, they should lock all the doors to prevent children from later entering the vehicle and becoming trapped.

Additional strategies and tips for parents and caregivers, include:

- Never leave a young child alone in a car, not even for a moment
- Keep car doors and trunks locked and keep key fobs out of reach
- Create reminders by putting something you’ll need soon after arrival at your destination in the back seat – a briefcase, purse, or cellphone
- Place a stuffed toy on the front seat as a visual cue reminding you to “Park. Look. Lock.”

- Arrange for your childcare center to call if your child is unexpectedly absent after the day begins
- Take action. If you see a child alone in a car, call first responders at 911

Human limitations, not carelessness, are a major contributor to children being unknowingly left in cars. A conscientious parent may intend to drop a child off at childcare, school or another destination, using what is known as “prospective” memory for that intended result. Once the routine of driving to that destination begins, the brain can revert to “habit memory” or “autopilot,” especially if schedules have been disrupted, and if the child is not visible in the back seat, a parent may forget he or she is there. In many heatstroke cases, the brain can even create a false memory that the parent or caregiver has dropped the child off as intended. Consistently practicing “Park. Look. Lock.” and using the other strategies forces a parent’s or caregiver’s active attention and can prevent tragedies.

To further address these human limitations, some newer vehicles have reminder systems built in that remind drivers to check the back seat, and a few car seat models incorporate reminder systems that communicate with vehicle computers and produce an alert if a child remains fastened in when the vehicle is turned off. Most major vehicle manufacturers have committed to including reminder systems by 2025, while car seat models with alert systems and add-on devices are also expanding.

Over several years, SKW and JPMA have been part of a group of advocates, including KidsAndCars.org, noheatstroke.org, National Safety Council, and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, all committed to stopping kids from dying in hot cars by using every tool necessary, including awareness, education, technology and advocacy.

“Improved technology is here and more is coming,” says Colella. “For today, every parent and caregiver should practice Park. Look. Lock.”

About Safe Kids Worldwide

Safe Kids Worldwide is a nonprofit organization working to protect kids from preventable injuries, the number one cause of death for children in the United States. Safe Kids works with an extensive network of more than 400 coalitions in the U.S. and with partners in more than 30 countries to reduce traffic injuries, drownings, falls, burns, poisonings and more. Safe Kids also engages in advocacy efforts to make kids safer at the federal, state and local levels. Since 1988, Safe Kids has helped reduce the U.S. childhood death rate from unintentional injury by nearly 60 percent. Join our effort at safekids.org.

About JPMA

The Juvenile Products Manufacturers Association (JPMA) is the voice of the industry on quality and safety for baby and children's products in North America. We do this by:

- Advocating for safety through product certification programs and legislative and regulatory involvement;
- Supporting a broad and diverse membership through member-only programming and industry promotion;
- And by acting as a comprehensive source for baby product information and education.

JPMA members represent 95 percent of the prenatal to preschool products sold in North America. To find out more about JPMA, our Certification program and Certified products, and for a complete listing of JPMA Members, please visit <https://www.jpma.org>. Follow JPMA on Twitter @JPMA and connect with us on Facebook to learn about additional safety tips and JPMA initiatives.



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