

Beware of heatstroke danger for children

June 2 2014, by Bev Kellner



The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service is helping National Safe Kids build awareness of child heat stroke danger as outdoor temperatures rise. Credit: Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

With warmer weather on its way, there is an increasing risk of children left alone in vehicles succumbing to heatstroke, said Bev Kellner, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service passenger safety specialist, College Station.

"As we approach summer in Texas, the danger of children dying from being left unattended in vehicles increases," Kellner said. "Two children have already died in 2014 from heatstroke with one of the deaths occurring in Texas. Unfortunately, more than half of the deaths involve a child in a [vehicle](#) being forgotten by a parent or caregiver."

She said AgriLife Extension is working in collaboration with National Safe Kids to remind Texans that children should never be left alone in vehicles, but especially during warm or hot weather.

Statistics from San Francisco State University show Texas leads the nation with the highest number of vehicle heatstroke deaths during the years 1998-2013, with 92 deaths during that time. In 2013, there were five vehicle heat-related deaths in Texas and 44 nationally, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

"Temperatures in parked vehicles rise very quickly and in just 10 minutes, the temperature inside a vehicle can increase by almost 20 degrees," Kellner said. "And children's body temperatures rise much faster than adults', making them more vulnerable to heatstroke."

With Texas temperatures soon to be climbing into the 90s and higher on a regular basis, the danger becomes even greater, Kellner said, adding that Safe Kids USA has launched a campaign titled ACT, which stands for avoid heatstroke-related injury, create reminders and take action.

Such deaths are preventable when parents take precautions to make sure children are not left alone in vehicles and cannot gain access to unlocked vehicles. According to Safe Kids, one-third of the heat-related deaths in 2000 were due to children becoming trapped in a vehicle they had crawled into.

"While many parents think this will never happen to them, it is a tragedy

that has happened to many families," Kellner said. "It's also important that parents talk to their babysitters, grandparents and others who care for their children to make them aware of the dangers of hyperthermia."

Keller said Texans should look for the ACT and Never Leave Your Child Alone in a Car campaign promotions, and follow these National Safe Kids tips:

- Never leave your child alone in the car, even for a minute.
- Consistently lock unattended vehicle doors and trunks.
- Establish a peace-of-mind plan. When you drop off your child, make a habit of calling or texting all caregivers, so all of you know where your child is at all times.
- Place a purse, briefcase, gym bag, cell phone or another item in a back seat that will be needed at your next stop.
- Set the alarm on your cell phone or computer calendar as a reminder to drop your child off at daycare or elsewhere.
- Dial 911 immediately if you feel a child may be in danger of hyperthermia. Follow instructions provided by emergency personnel as they are trained to determine if a [child](#) is truly in danger.

"Remember that in addition to heat risks, there are other safety concerns related to [children](#) in and around cars, including the [risk](#) of them releasing the gear shift or engaging electric windows or door locks and becoming trapped inside," Kellner said.

More information: For more information, visit the Safe Kids website nlyca.safekidsweb.org/resources/

Provided by Texas A&M University

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