

KEEPING KIDS SAFE – CHILDREN, CARS AND THE SUN

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Shelia Lewis, Family & Consumer Sciences

Each year, we hear news reports of children dying from heat strokes after being left in hot cars. SAFE KIDS reports that 30 children died in 1999 after being trapped in parked cars in the searing heat. Acc to GM research across the country there were almost 70 percent more of such fatalities reported in 2003 than in 2002. Since 1996, GM researchers have identified a total of 228 fatalities based upon media reports, however, the actual number could be higher. This year, GM researchers have already identified four fatalities. One occurred in early March in Oregon, on a day when the high temperature was less than 70F.

In Texas, this is a problem throughout the year. Texas has a law that prohibits children being left unattended in cars.

Temperatures in cars soar quickly. When the outside temperature is 93 degrees F, even with a window cracked, the temperature inside a car can reach 125 degrees in just 20 minutes. It can reach 140 degrees F. in 40 minutes. In these extreme conditions, children can die or suffer a permanent disability in a matter of minutes.

The National SAFE KIDS Campaign warns parents to be especially careful about their children's safety on days when temperatures are 80 degrees or higher. They offer the following safety precautions:

- Keep cars locked at all times, even in the garage or driveway.
- Teach children not to play in or around cars.
- Never leave your child in an unattended car, even with the windows down.
- Always make sure that all child passengers have left the car.
- If your child gets locked inside a car, get him/her out and dial 911 immediately.
- Make sure you check the temperature of the car-seat surface and safety belt buckles before restraining your children in the car.
- Use a light covering to shade the seat of your parked car. Consider using windshield shades in front and back windows.
- Be wary of child-resistant locks. Teach older children how to disable the driver's door locks if they become trapped in a car.

Car trunks can also be hazardous – children can get in, but can't always get out.

- Keep the trunk of your car locked at all times, especially when parked in the driveway or near the home.
- Keep the rear fold-down seats closed to help prevent kids from getting into the trunk from inside the car.
- Put car keys out of children's reach and sight.

Steps To Safer "Sunning"

1. Avoid the sun. This is especially important between 10:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m., when the sun's rays are strongest. Also avoid being in the sun when the UV Index is high in your area.

2. Use sunscreen products. For children 6 months to 2 years, use a sunscreen with at least an SPF (Sun Protection Factor) of 4, although 15 or higher is best. You should use an SPF 15 sunscreen everyday, since that number would block most of the sun's rays. (If you'll be out in the sun for more than an hour, though, use an SPF 30.) If you'll be sweating a lot, you may want to use an SPF 30 on your face no matter what, because the sweat will thin it down to an SPF 15 fast!

Sunscreens should not be used on babies younger than 6 months because their bodies may not be developed enough to handle sunscreen chemicals. Instead use hats, clothing and shading to protect small babies from the sun.

3. Wear sunglasses. Children should wear sunglasses, starting as young as age one. They need smaller versions of real, protective adult sunglasses, not toy sunglasses.

Shelia Lewis is a Smith County Extension agent in family and consumer sciences. She can be reached at 903/535-0885 or via e-mail at sk-lewis@tamu.edu.

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