

## DEATH FROM OVERHEATING: NEVER LEAVE YOUR CHILD ALONE IN A CAR

The Stone County Health Department wants your family to enjoy the summer months by making wise decisions to stay safe during the hot, humid weather. According to Jan Null, CCM, Professor of Meteorology at San Francisco State University, to date there have been sixteen deaths in 2010 of children due to hyperthermia from being in hot vehicles. Last year there were a total of at least 33 such fatalities in the United States due to hyperthermia after they were left in hot cars, trucks, vans and SUV's. Since 1998 there have been at least a total of 461 of these needless tragedies. This study shows that these incidents can occur on days with relatively mild (i.e., ~ 70 degrees F) temperatures and that vehicles can reach life-threatening temperatures very rapidly.

Children under four years of age are especially at risk for heat related-illness such as heat exhaustion, heat stroke, and hyperthermia. Heat is much more dangerous to children than it is to adults. When left in a hot vehicle, a young child's core body temperature may increase three to five times faster than that of an adult, making them more susceptible to heat stroke – even on a day with mild temperatures. The inside of a vehicle can rise 19 degrees above the outside temperature in just 10 minutes. After an hour, the temperature inside and outside of a vehicle can differ by 45 degrees or more – even if the window is left open a crack. This could cause permanent injury or even death. Heat stroke occurs when the core body temperature reaches 104 degrees Fahrenheit. A core body temperature of 107 degrees Fahrenheit is usually fatal as cells are damaged and internal organs shut down. Folding windshield shades help keep the interior of a parked car from getting hot to the touch, but they **do not** make it safe to leave a child inside. Kim King, Health Educator and Car Passenger Safety Technician, does not recommend window shades that attach with suction cups because they can become dangerous projectiles in the event of a crash. To protect your children from heat-related injury or illness, follow these guidelines:

- **NEVER LEAVE A CHILD UNATTENDED IN A VEHICLE. NOT EVEN FOR A MINUTE!**
- **IF YOU SEE A CHILD UNATTENDED IN A HOT VEHICLE CALL 9-1-1.**
- Be sure that all occupants leave the vehicle when unloading. Don't overlook sleeping babies.
- Always lock your car and ensure children do not have access to keys or remote entry devices. If a child is missing, check the car first, including the trunk. Teach your children that vehicles are never to be used as a play area.
- If your vehicle has child-resistant locks, teach older children how to unlock the doors if they unintentionally get locked in. To prevent children from being locked in the trunk, ask your dealer about getting your car retrofitted with an interior trunk release.
- Keep a stuffed animal in the carseat and when the child is put in the seat place the animal in the front with the driver.
- Or place your purse or briefcase in the back seat as a reminder that you have your child in the car.
- Make "look before you leave" a routine whenever you get out of the car.
- Have a plan that your childcare provider will call you if your child does not show up for school.

The Stone County Health Department warns parents not to underestimate the danger of overheating in parked cars. Fortunately, the most foolproof precaution is also the simplest: **never leave your child alone**. For more information visit our website [www.stonecountyhealthdepartment.com](http://www.stonecountyhealthdepartment.com) or call Kim King, Health Educator at 357-6134. To see a demonstration of how quickly a car heats up in moderate temperatures, please visit [www.ggweather.com/heat](http://www.ggweather.com/heat).